MOO II • Privateer 2 • Borg
Phantasmagoria II

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PC GAMES

CONNECTING GAMERS TO GAMES

STAR TREK EXCLUSIVE! Guided Tour GENERATIONS

OUTLAWS LucasArts

Revisit the Spaghetti Western

SNEAK PEEK
Bungie's
3D Blood Bath

MYTH

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March 1997
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03 >
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REVIEWS:
NBA Live '97
Lords of the Realm II
Wages of War
FPS: Football '97
M.A.X.

ONLINE SPACE SIMS:
SubSpace, Stars!

State of the RPG

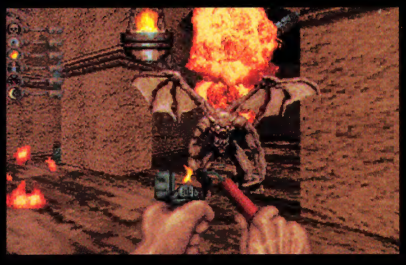
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind
Lands of Lore II • Ultima IX/Online

http://www.pcgames.com

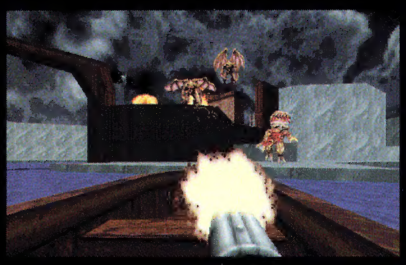
Blood?

It's in your veins. It's on your hands. And you're screaming for it.

It's a tidal wave of first-person shooter carnage...



Who to Kill: zombies, cultists, gargoyles, hellhounds, mimes, bats, rats and more



Where to Kill: graveyards, crematoriums, mausoleums, slaughter houses and more

How to Kill: voodoo dolls, flamethrowers, pitchforks, dual tommyguns, TNT and more

You carved your soul to shreds in servitude to a dark god, but false promises and betrayal were your only reward. Now you've got a score to settle, and it will be measured in ...

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Spill some.

shareware available in stores

march 1997

Download the demo at www.gtinteractive.com/blood

www.lith.com

MATURE M AGES 17+ ESRB

DOS/PC CD-ROM

GT Interactive Software

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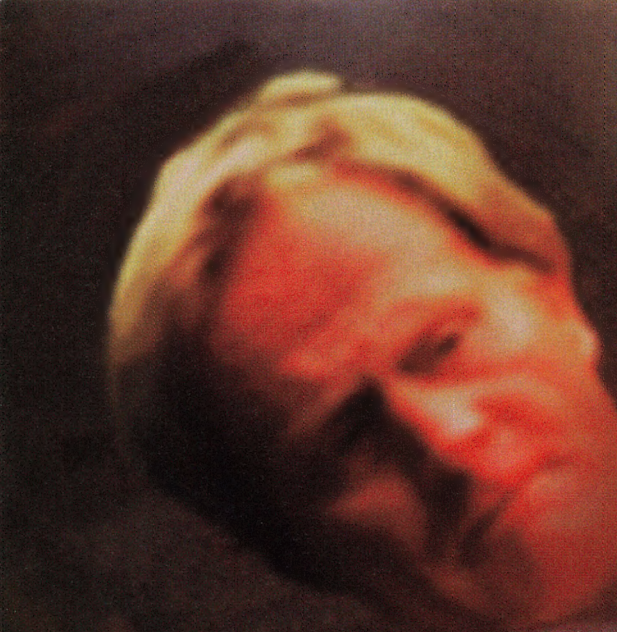
you're
soaking
in it.



"The Course Designer is a landmark!"
-T. Liam McDonald
PC Gamer

"...impressive..."
GOLFWEEK

"...gives Links LS a run for its money."
Strategy Plus

"A truly revolutionary product. Links finally has some stiff competition. A Course Designer so easy to use, that you'll quickly find yourself addicted. 16.7 million colors with one major improvement: virtually no redraw wait."
Computer and Net Player

"...promises to be among the greatest achievements yet on the electronic links."
PC Games

introducing

Jack Nicklaus 4™

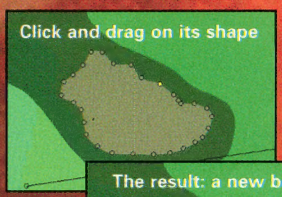
Featuring *Colleton River Plantation, Country Club of the South, Muirfield Village, Cabo del Sol,* and *Winding Springs.*

The Course Designer

This is the Course Designer that created all 5 Nicklaus-designed courses in the game!

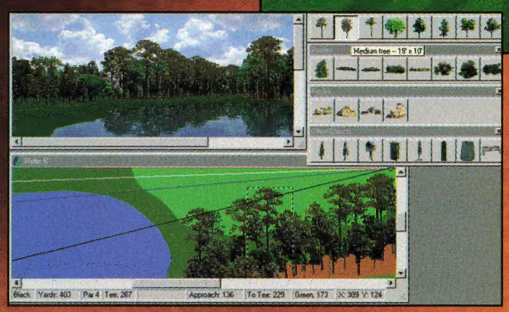
Use the Designer to re-create your favorite course! Import, modify, and play courses from previous Nicklaus games!

Input the basic details of a course from a real scorecard–the "Wizard" automatically routes each hole.



Click and drag on its shape

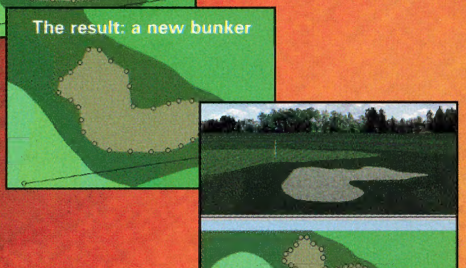
Choose from a variety of templates, or create your own shapes. Changing terrain is as easy as click-and-drag.



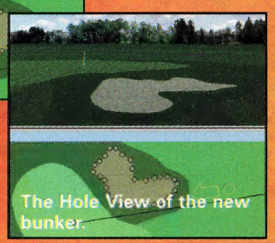
"Is it live or is it...?" Our Course Designer is so true-to-life, it's hard to tell the difference!

This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.

Choose from over 100 different types of trees, bushes, rocks, and other objects!



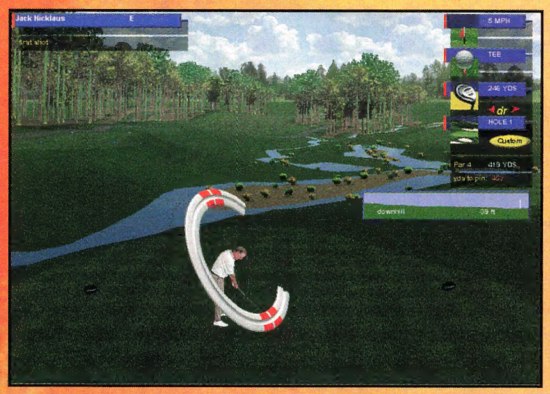
The result: a new bunker



The Hole View of the new bunker.

From Tee to Green

The Tee Shot



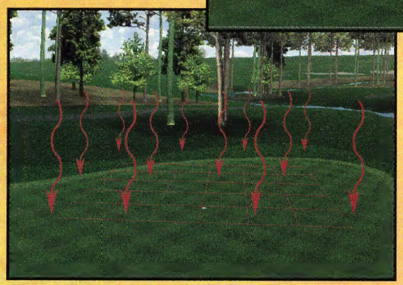
Pop-up displays are optional– leave them off for the purest golfing experience.

The fastest screen redraw times on the PC allow the camera to automatically switch to the landing in full-screen, from varying viewpoints!

Around The Green

Separate chipping and putting meters maximize control around the green.

Our new approach makes putting more realistic. Mow lines on the green help you read the contour.



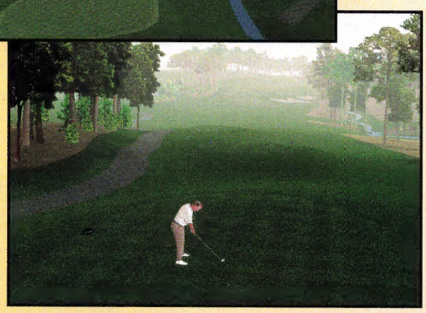
For enhanced gameplay, this optional grid floats down and drapes itself over the green, clearly showing all high and low spots.

The Approach Shot

New "Intensity Control™" reproduces the dynamics that shape the shot. "Club up and swing easy" for control or a low trajectory; "swing hard" when you want spin and distance.

Every shot flies, bounces, and rolls true to the game, with the best ball physics model in existence. Courses are accurate to within 6 inches!

Multiplayer play is fully supported, including recorded rounds, shared keyboard, serial, modem, LAN and Internet play.

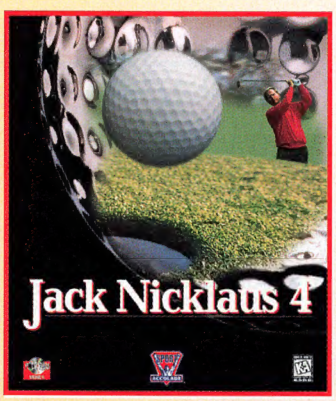


Weather can change in the middle of the round, and natural wind variations and every possible turf condition add to the challenge!

Look for the Jack Nicklaus 4 playable demos in select magazines, online at **http://www.accolade.com** *or at your local retailer.*

For hints and tips on Accolade products, call Accolade Direct 1-900-454-HINT. $0.99/minute. If you are under 18, please get your parents' permission before making this call.

Call 1–800–245–7744 to order direct



PC CD-ROM WINDOWS 95

MODEM SERIAL SOLO PLUS LAN INTERNET™

ACCOLADE

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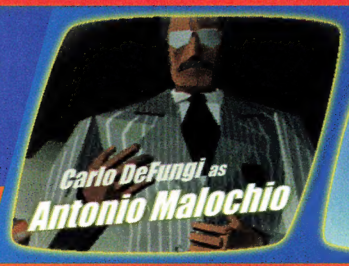
More dynamic than any driving game!
More explosive than any action sim!
More flammable than polyester!

They killed your sister. Now they're out to get the U.S. of A.
They've messed with the wrong Champion.



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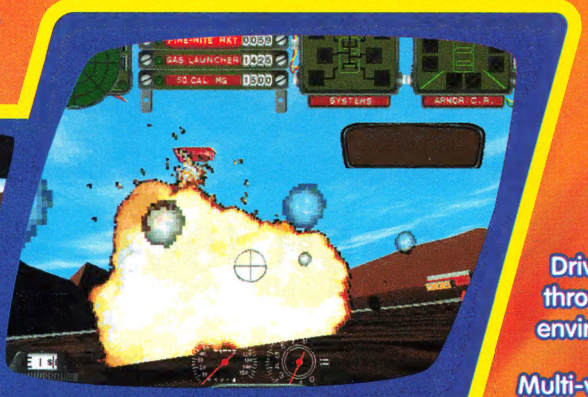

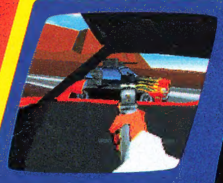

Drive freely through unrestricted environments!

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Super-realistic dynamics based on actual vehicle physics!

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MARCH 1997
VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3

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By Barry Brenesal

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43 Outlaws
By Daniel Morris

Ever since you first saw *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, you've wanted to be in a Western. Now, LucasArts gives you a chance with Outlaws. It's a crafty first-person tribute to the days of Earp, Butch, and Sundance. But be careful: You're going to need everything working under that 10-gallon you're wearing...

GUIDED TOUR

46 Star Trek: Generations
By George T. Chronis

Saw the movie? Didn't like it, maybe? Well, now you can play the game and do it your way as Picard, Data, and even Kirk, as they avoid the pitfalls of the Nexus. Our Guided Tour takes you through the game and gives you a good look at what to expect from the next *Trek* game.

CHECK OUT OUR WEB SITE!

ONLINE STORIES

- Comics-based Games
- Golf Round-up
- Independence Day Preview
- MDK Guided Tour

In the Zone
All about Sports Games

Editors' Choice
Words of wisdom from *PC Games*' editors for our Web audience

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http://www.pcgames.com

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PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

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EDITOR'S NOTE

STEVE KLETT

Online Promise

No doubt you've heard a lot of talk about the potential of online gaming for the last year—how cool online games would be, how easy they'd be to get into, and how well they would perform. Of course, that was just talk.

But now we're starting to see signs of a burgeoning online gaming community, and more and more actual games are popping up that are quite playable—and addictive. Take Blizzard's Diablo and Battle.net game server, for example (our cover story last month). This real-time RPG is performing well over the Internet, and has gained a host of fans and a rabid following in short order. Indeed, many people logged onto Battle.net before even trying the stand-alone game (and, judging from the strength of their characters, many haven't left). Best of all, Battle.net is free—with the exception of your ISP charges, of course. It's kept me up to the wee hours of the morning on several work nights so far, and I know there are many more to come.

Meanwhile, QuakeWorld has emerged from vaporware status to reality (see story, page 15). Now you can see how your Quake Clan's skills match up to those rival Clans over in Finland and Australia, and vie for worldwide bragging rights. Very exciting, and yet more fodder for Clan PCGames.

There are also some games cropping up quietly on the Internet that are less latency-dependent and more enjoyable than many heavily hyped games. We've uncovered a few for you to check out in this issue, starting with SubSpace on page 73, which may be one of the sleeper hits of the year. This 1990s take on Asteroids meets Space War is simple, yet surprisingly fun. Meanwhile, hard-core strategists will want to take a look at Empire Interactive's Stars! (see review, page 74).

Starting this month, *PC Games* provides a quick-hit look at all that's happening with the major (and up-and-coming) online gaming services in our news section. Check out page 25 for a list of current service providers, the games they offer, subscription costs, and how many people are gaming online. There's a lot of competition shaping up out there, and we'll do our best to help connect you to the best online gaming options for you.

Of course, *PC Games* continues to bring you information on all the best stand-alone CD-ROMs as well. This month, news & technology editor (and resident Duke pigeon) George T. Chronis boldly takes you on a Guided Tour of MicroProse's Star Trek: Generations. This long-delayed title is looking to be worth the wait to *Trek* fans, as it's much more than just a rehash of the film. We've also got the latest on LucasArts' first-person Wild West action game, Outlaws. While not as sexy as Quake, Outlaws is a barrel of laughs—and quite challenging—in multiplayer mode (yes, we played it). It's an entertaining tribute to the spaghetti western.

As always, you'll also want to catch this month's crop of quality *PC Games* reviews, as we continue to bring you the most reliable reviews first. I could go on and on, but I'm keeping you from all the great gaming information you've been waiting for. Enjoy!

Steve Klett

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VOXEL SPACE2

PC GAMES.EXE

21 HOT DEMOS

Demo of the Month
Privateer 2: The Darkening (Origin)

Action Games
Stargunner (Apogee)

Adventure Games
Koala Lumpur: Journey to the Edge (Broderbund)
Outlaws .avi movie (LucasArts)
Realms of the Haunting (Interplay)

Arcade Games
SoulTrap (Microforum)

Fly & Drive Games
Destruction Derby 2 (Psygnosis)

Strategy Games
Fallen Haven (I-Magic)
The Great Battles of Alexander (I-Magic)
Heroes of Might and Magic II (New World Computing)
Magic: The Gathering (MicroProse)

Online Games
Air Warrior (Aries Online Games)
Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris (Aries Online Games)
SubSpace v1.19 (Virgin)

Online Services
AOL:
50 free hours trial software
EarthLink Network:
BattleTech: Solaris
Casino Poker
Harpoon Online
Mplayer:
Big Red Racing Enabler
Command & Conquer Enabler
C&C: Red Alert Enabler
Quake Enabler
Total Entertainment Network:
Deadlock Shareware
Quake Shareware
Quake Enabler
C&C: Red Alert Enabler

Patches and Add-ons
Wages of War patch (New World Computing)

Utilities
SciTech Display Doctor 5.3
QuickTime for Windows
Win32s
WinG

DEMO OF THE MONTH

Privateer 2: The Darkening

Origin

Origin's big-name, expansive space-exploration epic is here, complete with an all-star cast including Christopher Walken, John Hurt, and Clive Owen in the lead role. As Lev Arris, suffering from amnesia, the universe is at your call. But events turn sour as everyone seems to have it in for him. So take to the stars, uncover your past, and shoot some bad guys in the bargain.

Getting Started

Win 95

1. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
2. Wait a few seconds and the disc will autoplay. If this fails to happen, use Windows Explorer to find the *pcgames.exe* file on the CD and double-click to run.

Win 3.1

1. Start Windows.
2. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
3. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
4. Type "d:\setup" in the Command Line box and press Enter.

Getting Around

Navigating PC Games.EXE is a breeze. From the opening screen, view the list of great game demos contained on the CD. When you're ready to go, click on the "Take me to your Demos" arrow in the bottom right corner. The next screen highlights our Demo of the Month: Privateer 2: The Darkening. Click on the main image to view the game details and install.

Scroll through the screens to find any other demo that whets your appetite, click on the icon to get further details and install instructions, then off you go.

To save download time and make connecting to the world of online games a cinch, we've included software for a cluster of online services , as well as some games currently being enjoyed online by gamers en masse. Don't stay out in the cold—get connected. Enjoy.

In Case of Emergency

PCs, Microsoft's Visual Basic, Windows 95—sometimes they just don't go well together. In those instances you may get an error while loading. Should this happen, don't panic. It's not a serious problem, but a conflict that gets in the way of the program running. In the event of the interface not running, all the demos are still accessible and will still work fine in their own right. Here's how to do it: In Windows 95, open "My Computer." Right-click on the *PC Games* CD logo and click "Open." All the game directories will be displayed. Double-click on the game you want and locate the *readme* file for that game. Double-click to open it and read the installation instructions.

Most games have a *setup.exe* or *install.exe* file that configures the game for your machine. Follow the instructions to get optimum performance, such as rebooting in MS-DOS mode to get to the DOS-based games.

Windows 3.1 users can find all the game demos in the File Manager. Run through the same process of reading the *readme* file, then follow the installation instructions.

If you experience insurmountable difficulties, we can accept e-mail technical support questions addressed to ctou@pcgames.com

OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR TEN CONTEST

1. No Purchase Necessary. No purchase or payment of any money is necessary to enter. To enter the sweepstakes, print your name and address (including your city, state, and zip code) on a card and mail it to: Total Entertainment Network Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404. Enter as often as you like, but each entry must be mailed separately. All entries must be handwritten. Mechanically reproduced entries will not be accepted. Entries must be postmarked by **March 24, 1997.** Entries will not be returned. The sponsor and PC Games Publishing, Inc., assume no responsibility for lost, mutilated, late, or misdirected entries.

2. Prizes. Total Entertainment Network Contest prizes and grand prize will be awarded. Grand Prize is valued at less than $500. The aggregate retail value of all prizes is less than $5,000 U.S. dollars. Winners will be determined at a drawing to be held on April 21, 1997. All prizes will be awarded. Prize winners will be notified by mail by May 26, 1997. To claim your prize, send your winning game piece to Total Entertainment Network Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd, Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404.

3. Odds of Winning. Odds of winning depend upon the number of qualified entries received.

4. Eligibility. Sweepstakes are open to residents of the United States. However, for entrants under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must be designated the winner if the entrant is selected, and prizes will be awarded to a parent or guardian in trust for that minor. Citizens of Canada are excluded from participation and receiving any prizes from the sweepstakes. Employees of PC Games Publishing, Inc., and/or Total Entertainment Network, their subsidiaries, affiliates, advertising agencies and immediate families are not eligible for prizes. No more than one prize will be awarded to any entrant.

5. Requirements and Responsibility of Winners. Winners will be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility and a publicity release that will allow the use of winners' names and likenesses for other promotional activities by the sponsor and/or PC Games Publishing, Inc. All federal, state and local taxes are the responsibility of winners.

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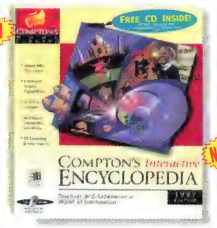

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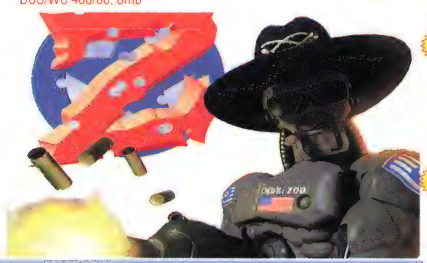

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MDK

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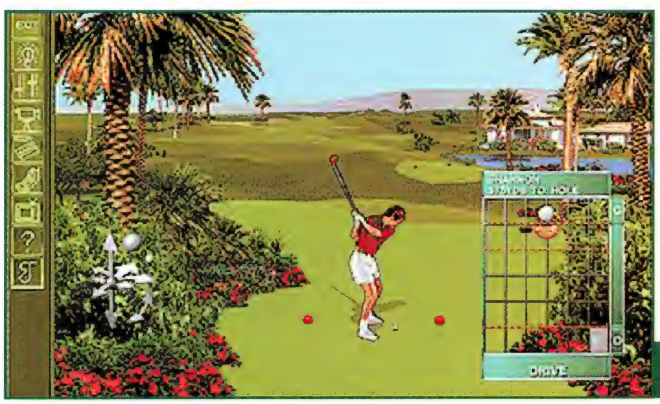
Redneck Rampage

Spider-Man: The Venom Factor

Tee 'em Up

Spring...the time for the Masters, the opening of golf courses everywhere, and the best of the new computer golf games. Assistant editor Daniel Morris takes you through the newest releases in our *PC Games* Web-exclusive feature.



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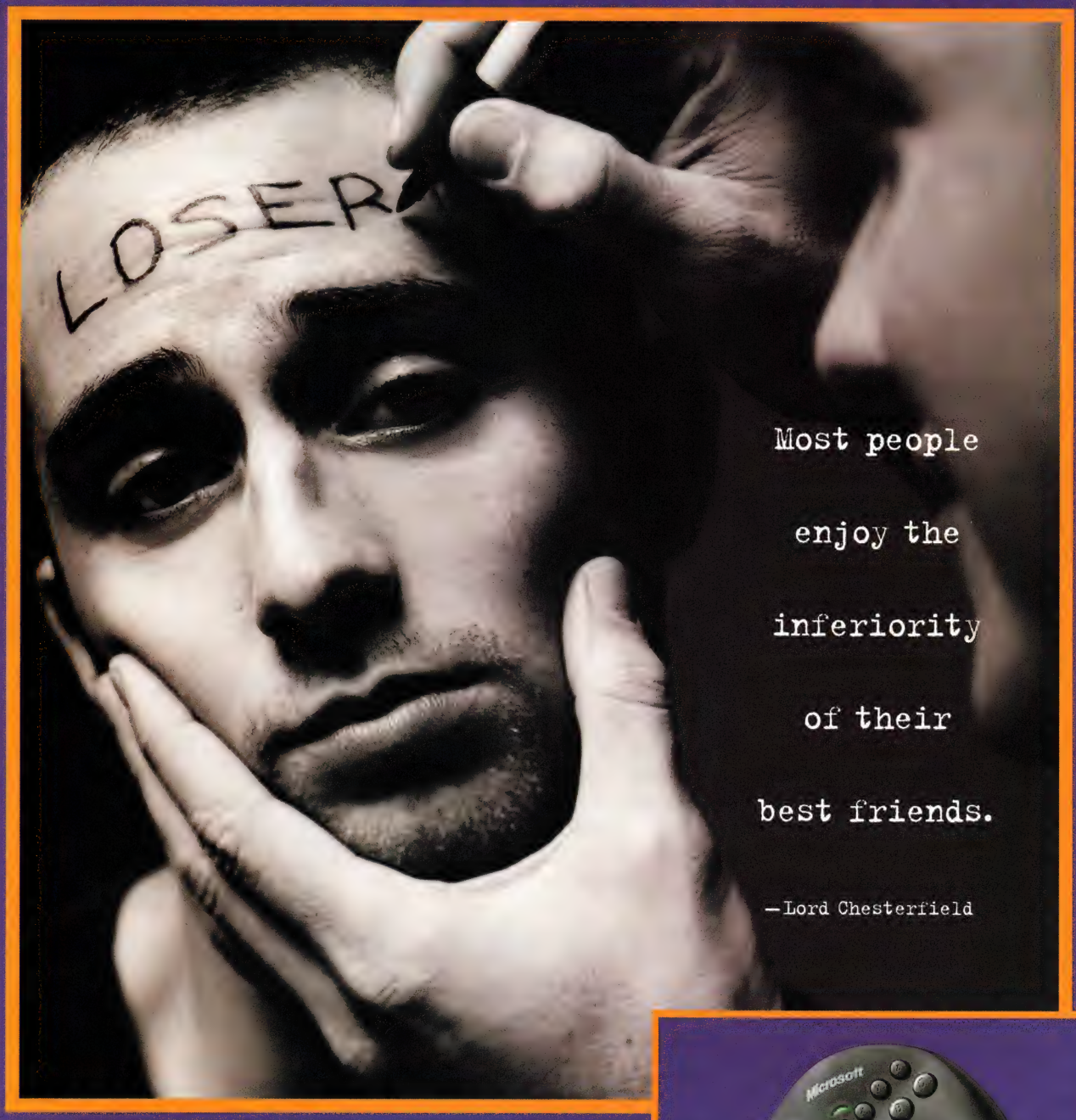
Superheroes. Super Games?

For years, you've heard it: Comic books would be perfect for games—but that's never been the case. Are things finally changing? Senior copy editor Corey Cohen grabs his webshooters and enters the world of comics-based games to give you the answer.

MDK: The Web Guided Tour

Finally, a game that really looks and plays like *Blade Runner*. Shiny Entertainment moves away from its Earthworm Jim roots to craft this amazing 3D action/adventure. Get a deeper look at MDK on PC Games.COM.



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INCOMING!

Question of the Month: What's That?

Whoa, check it out! This month, we're forgoing the usual brain-busting topic in favor of something simple. Want a crack at a free *PC Games* T-shirt and a free game? All you have to do is name the game that the guy in this month's Incoming! icon comes from. (Hint: It's in this issue.) Write it down and send it to us at PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; or e-mail: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. We'll randomly choose one correct answer as our lucky winner; you must include your full name to be eligible.

LANd of Opportunity

I just finished reading your Jan. '97 Opponent column, "A Multiplayer WasteLANd," and would like to comment. Although you make several good points about most people having access to a private LAN, there are alternatives.

About a year ago, some friends and I were pondering this very question. Why have LAN code in a game when the average person doesn't have the luxury of such a thing? I proposed that we set up our own network and promised to do it for less than $50 each. After buying each person a basic ISA BNC card (T connector included), 35 feet of 58RGB cable, and a pack of 10 BNC connectors plus 2 terminators, the cost to each of us was about $48—the price of an average PC game these days. I downloaded the IPX drivers from the Internet, so there was no software cost. That $48 has given us much more fun than any one game could have. We declared the first Saturday of each month Net Day, and it is something we all look forward to.

I can understand your desire to improve areas of multiplayer like the Internet, but until the phone company or the cable industry improve bandwidth to the average user, true multiplayer over such a service will not happen. I am not unique in that many people have done the same thing we have. Plus, no matter how much it improves in the future, Internet gaming will never replace having your friends in the same room while you play. With advancements in Win 95's Direct Play for LAN support and the many new titles arriving soon for network play, our gaming future is bright. *PC Games* should consider an article on how to set up your own inexpensive LAN at home.

Ben Dunaway
Via the Internet

For information on a do-it-yourself LAN, see "Play Network Games at Home" in PC Games, *July 1996, page 84.* —*Ed.*

Where's the Magic?

I was wondering if there's been any new information on the upcoming release of the Magic: The Gathering game. Will there be a demo on your CD?
VMASON@TrentU.ca

The good news is that there are actually two Magic games in production. At press time, Acclaim's Magic: The Gathering—BattleMage, an action/strategy game set in the card game's fantasy universe, was scheduled to hit stores this month. There's also MicroProse's Magic: The Gathering, a simulation that more closely duplicates the card-playing experience. Originally slated to ship in summer '96, it's been delayed; the current release date is April. As far as demos, we've got MicroProse's on this month's disc; Acclaim's (if they produce one) is a definite possibility for the future. —*Ed.*

Different Strategies

I just wanted to compliment Rob Smith and Daniel Morris on their "Face-off" in the January issue. This subject is one of great interest to me since I'm currently on the development team for an upcoming real-time strategy game, Dominion. It was very interesting to see their different views on both genres of games.

I'll admit that I tend to favor real-time strategy over turn-based, which is really quite a good thing considering the game I'm working on. I also tend to think that there is not really a "strategy versus real-time strategy" issue. The advent of real-time strategy games really created a new genre in gaming altogether. It happened to get "strategy" appended to it due to the fact that controlling a large group of individual units is similar to the traditional strategy game. However, given the real-time nature of the game, a lot of the methodical strategy previously used has been replaced by more generalized strategy. As Rob Smith said, real-time offers gamers a lot more action and excitement. After having played X-COM and Jagged Alliance, however, I might differ with saying that real-time offers more involvement with the missions and campaigns.

Another issue relevant to both genres is multiplayer games. I've played Command & Conquer, Warcraft II, and Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games against others in my office. While Deadly Games was fun, waiting between turns did take away from the feeling of excitement. On the other hand, it added to the suspense and anticipation while you waited to see if someone appeared from around the corner. But C&C and Warcraft II do offer a much faster, more furious gaming experience.

Really, there's plenty of room for both genres, and while I personally wouldn't want to face Daniel Morris head-to-head in an SSI game, since he would stomp me, I look forward to seeing what Rob Smith thinks of our product.

Patrick Deupree
Senior Software Engineer, 7th Level

Contest Winners!

Almost every month, *PC Games* has a contest where we give out hardware, software, or other game goods to our readers. (Hey, we like you guys!) Here, for the envy of their peers and eternal glory, are the lucky winners of some recent giveaways:

October, Talk Back: "Think 3D Graphics"
Winners: Surjit Sidhu, Dewey M. DeVane
The Loot: Diamond 3D Board

October, CD Card: "Space Bunnies Must Die!"
Winners: Donna Walter (grand prize); Sky Busk, David Casey, Nick Checque, Jim Dennison, Stephe Hung, Hiro Naro, Ed Oliver, Dave Orban, Russell Robinson, Kevin Seibert, Eric M. Smith (first prizes)
The Loot: Space Bunnies original art (grand prize), Space Bunnies T-shirts (first prizes)

November, Talk Back: "Sound Off About Online Gaming"
Winners: Shaun Shull (grand prize); Joseph M. Kile, Jr., Scott R. Ley, Robert Van Pala, Wilbur L. Wilmany II (first prizes)
The Loot: Online gaming package and Mplayer shirt (grand prize), Mplayer shirt (first prizes)

November, CD Card: "Amok"
Winners: Reuben Beverly, Seth Caldon, James Fletcher, Dean Goebel, Curtis Russell, Brian Taylor, Kim Tehan, Kerry Varga
The Loot: A copy of Amok

December, Talk Back: "Learn the History of Toonstruck"
The Winners: Landon Ashby, Kris Banks, Joseph Elizondo, William Graves, Danny Mihelich, Matthew Panneton, William Rockenstire, Clarence Smith, Lee Wang, Andy Well (grand prizes); Josh Bolaski, Philip Castillo, Shamus Chapman, Adam Dabdoub, Bob Dickerson, Griff DiGuardo, Pete Dillon, Michael Ditullio, Jason Ellis, Juan Faulkner, David Girard, Alan Gottesman, Kristoffer Javier, Levi Johnson, James Korwek, Ted Lantafe, Bradley LaVine, Andrew Lee, Edward Pessalano, Joseph Pinette, Danielle Redding, Alice Rink, Sam Ruff, Mike Stevenson, Bryan Weaver, Dustin Widick, Ashley Wirges, Adam Wisniewski, Jr., Jonathan Yau, Jimmy Zatko (first prizes)
The Loot: Original art and copy of Toonstruck (grand prize), copy of Toonstruck (first prize)

December, CD Card: "TEN"
The Winners: Acton Denton, Will Mottern, Scott Neilson, Ben Olin, Douglas Zachow (grand prizes); Jeff Ackiss, Kevin Jardine, Richard Mehl, Thomas Margiano, Mike Rothenberg, Kim Tehan, William Warren, Theodore Whitecotten, Pei Wang Kevin Zander (first prizes)
The Loot: TEN subscription and T-shirt (grand prize), TEN T-shirt (first prize)

TEN, Mplayer Boost Speed on Quake Play

Quake. Online. Speed boost. That's all you need to hear, right?

TEN and Mplayer both hope so. In the battle between these online gaming services, fast connections are a crucial element, and each service is touting recent strategies designed to get play latency down.

TEN has developed a means of allowing fairly smooth Quake play even over a 14.4Kbps modem (no fooling—we tried it out). The technology, called Dart, trims redundant information from game data packets before they're sent over the TEN network or to TEN via the Internet; TEN says that as much as two-thirds of the packet can be discarded before it's sent. Once the packet arrives at your machine, Quake restores the missing information. The trimness of the packet sizes means they're far less likely to clog up while being sent to your machine, keeping network latency (the speed with which information is sent over a network) down so far that even a basic modem can play smoothly.

Dart isn't a Quake-only technology, says TEN's chief technologist, Bill Lipa, but can be applied to any data packet; thus, TEN will eventually use Dart for all of its games. Dart will be resident in the newest version of the TEN software, downloadable from the company's Web site.

Additionally, TEN is installing an extended set of regional hubs to provide better online gameplay. The network says its goal is to reduce latency to an average under 135 milliseconds within a region, from its current average speed of 225ms. The new hubs will spread across California first, and then throughout the rest of the United States by the end of March.

Meanwhile, Mplayer is also touting speedy connections for Quake and all its other games through its own Internet service, which creates a "carpool lane" over its PSINet backbone that gives high priority for game-packet traffic over the congested Internet. Besides the connection to Mplayer, the deal, which costs $19.95 monthly, also serves as your basic Internet service provider (a capability TEN plans but doesn't yet offer); precise details are at **www.mplayer.com/isp/**. *—Donald St. John*

With decreased latency over Mplayer and TEN, you should have no trouble carving this bastard into roasts and chops.

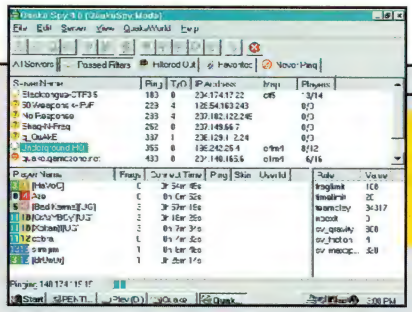
QuakeWorld Arrives

At last! After delays and rumors suggesting that it might never happen, QuakeWorld, id's master Internet server, finally got up and running. On December 13, the QuakeWorld server software was released, followed on the 17th by the client software that, for Joe Gamesplayer, was the key.

So what does it do, and was it all worth it? Basically, QuakeWorld is a method of linking all those Quake servers around the world to id's master server. There, names, clans, and scores will be stored, providing—once everything is running smoothly—the "official" rankings and stats for the best Quake players across the globe (or at least the best within the QuakeWorld system).

QuakeWorld uses the excellent server locator QSpy. After downloading the 1.4MB client software (qwcl.exe), run the .exe, then install the .dlls. Running the qw.exe launches QSpy and lets you log in to QuakeWorld. Unfortunately, that means having to give yourself a name and password. The clamor for the prize names on the server has resulted in a logjam of traffic, making it difficult to access. Once done, however, you have your own log-in number, and a few new features are added to the QSpy menu items.

In addition, there are some changes to Quake 1.06's menus and messages. First, single and multiplayer options aren't available when you run QuakeWorld; instead, there's an Internet option. Also, there are some new



QuakeWorld links server and play information.

commands available at the console. These include "pushlatency," which lets you find your ping time (press TAB), and "pushlatency" followed by a negative of your ping time. This has the effect of telling Quake to anticipate certain positioning information. If it gets everything right, latency can be significantly reduced.

Does it work? Well, sort of. Even on a 33.6 modem on the lowest ping time, servers located by QSpy's connection to the Stomped Web site at **www.stomped.com** offered gameplay verging on the impossible. Was it just me, or was everyone else moving around smoothly as I stuttered, slid, and meandered lazily to another deflating death?

But this is the future, allegedly. Hopefully, by the time you read this, the excitement will have waned, and the action will be far more accessible.

—Rob Smith

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GAMEWIRE

The Battle For 3D on the PC

Major forces in the PC world have set their sights on improving 3D performance in 1997. Intel is spearheading the assault on existing 3D choices with its accelerated graphics port (AGP) technology-standard initiative. And because it's Intel, Microsoft and many of the leading graphics-chip companies such as ATI, S3, and 3D Labs have announced their support for the AGP specification.

AGP, expected to become widely available before the 1997 Christmas buying season, is a central component of Intel's multimedia strategy along with MMX (multimedia extensions). The first systems with AGP will sport Intel's new Klamath processor, a Pentium replacement with MMX. The combination of the new CPU, MMX-enhanced software, and AGP promises a whopping 500 percent improvement over current PCI-based solutions.

Prior to AGP's unveiling, Microsoft announced its own 3D enhancement strategy, code-named Talisman. Although similar in many ways to AGP, early Talisman plans suggest that the technologies are more competitive than complementary.

The third segment of the AGP coalition, the graphics-chips suppliers, is in a tough position. The graphics-chip business has been one of the few venues that Intel hasn't dominated, but it clearly intends to use AGP to change that. Intel currently integrates S3 and ATI graphics subsystems in many of the motherboards it produces, but Intel recently purchased part of Real3D, a company that plans to build AGP-compliant graphics boards.

Balanced against the specter of competing with Intel is the promise of a huge market opening up. 3D hardware companies currently rely on game developers such as Activision and Interplay to produce specific versions of such games as MechWarrior 2 and Descent II that take advantage of the new 3D technology. This obviously limits the number of titles available for each particular board, and can confuse gamers. With a common 3D gaming standard such as AGP, smaller developers won't be hampered by a lack of titles and larger companies can reach more gamers.

ATI is questioning the speed of Intel's AGP standard.

Publicly, the AGP partners continue to present a unified and optimistic front. However, some cracks have already begun to appear, well before the first AGP-based products have begun to ship. Intel and Microsoft have yet to agree on how their respective technologies will mesh. AGP bypasses the relatively slow PCI bus in favor of a new, dedicated graphics connection to system RAM to store 3D texture maps. Talisman, on the other hand, is a PCI-based specification that relies heavily on dedicated graphics processors and graphics card–based RAM.

Fortunately, both Intel and Microsoft seem committed

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to ironing out the differences. Microsoft says that it will support AGP in a version of DirectDraw that will be released in the second half of 1997 and provide AGP support in future versions of both Windows NT and Windows 95.

Friction between Intel and the graphics-chip companies is easier to see and potentially more damaging to the future of the coalition. Already, ATI has announced that it doesn't believe that Intel's baseline 66MHz version of the AGP specification will be adequate. A founding member of the AGP group, ATI remains firmly committed to the technology, but insists that the higher 133MHz version be adopted as the baseline.

Another group, the systems manufacturers, will also have much at stake in the way that AGP is introduced. Because the new graphics architecture is so tightly bound to a motherboard's supporting chip set, it is very likely that customized AGP graphics cards will need to be designed for each non-Intel motherboard design. This obviously concerns both system manufacturers and OEM card designers—the people who make the low-cost systems most gamers can afford. Intel says it expects to manufacture nearly all AGP motherboards at first, but that as the standard becomes more firm, it expects competition without compatibility issues.

—J. V. Bolkan

GTE Interactive Drops Out

Timelapse: last of its kind.

Despite strong sales of its two fourth-quarter releases—Timelapse and Cyberflix's Titanic: Adventure Out of Time—the corporate parent of GTE Interactive Media has pulled the plug on the division that released such hits as FX Fighter and The Rolling Stones: Voodoo Lounge.

GTE Interactive will shut down March 14, although director of marketing communications Rik Sandoval says gamers who have recently purchased GTE games shouldn't worry, since the division is keeping enough staff on hand to support the titles through June 1.

"We believe that anyone who has bought one of our games by March will probably experience any problems they are going to by June, so we think we'll have most computer gamers covered," he says.

As for all games that were not released by last Christmas, GTE is canceling them outright, though Sandoval says GTE is continuing to ship stock of existing titles to retailers through the end of January.

According to Sandoval, success was not a factor in GTE's decision to shut down its interactive operations, which accounted for $20 million in revenues during 1995.

Titanic sinks on March 14.

"GTE simply decided that it didn't want to be in the content-creation business anymore," he says.

Both Timelapse and Titanic have sold well, says GTE Interactive vice president of sales Dick Larkin.

"I don't have the final PC Data figures available to me, but from looking at our own retail tracking, it wouldn't surprise me if Timelapse snuck into the top 10 best-selling games for the first quarter, and Titanic the top 20," Larkin says.

—George T. Chronis

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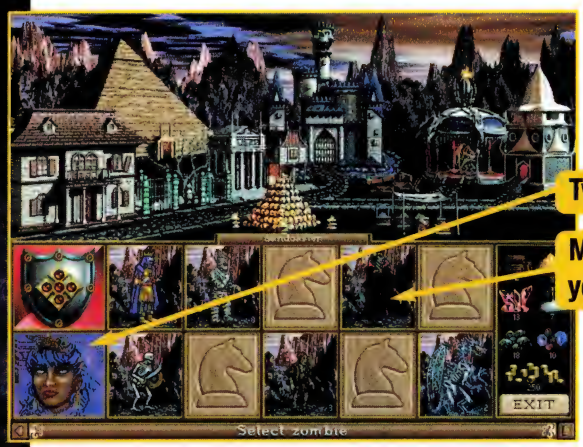

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GAME BYTES

ARIES Claims Best Monthly Multiplayer Usage

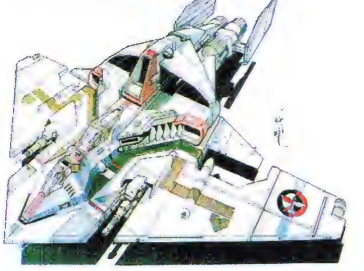
ARIES Online Games says it generated more than 1 million paid hours of multiplayer usage in December, making it the first such network to do so in a single month. The Kesmai-owned service offers such games as Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris and Air Warrior. ARIES claims it has a customer base of more than 100,000 gamers.

Busby Migrates to Win 95

ATI has developed a special version of Accolade's Busby video game for Windows 95 jockeys. Super Busby takes full advantage of Microsoft's DirectX APIs, and was put together specifically to show off the acceleration capabilities of ATI's upcoming graphics cards. Super Busby pits the feline hero against aliens set upon stealing every ball of wool on Earth.

Interplay to Give Away M.A.X. to Pentagon

Computer gamers who work at the Pentagon can get a copy of M.A.X.: Mechanized Assault & Exploration for free by writing to Interplay CEO Brian Fargo. Fargo made the offer in a savvy patriotic pitch to drum up publicity for the turn-based strategy game. Military gamers can take the executive up on his offer if they provide proof of their Pentagon credentials. Write to Interplay, Attn: Brian Fargo, 16815 Von Karman Ave., Irvine, CA 92606.



Starship Troopers: A Treat for the Sci-fi Crowd

As bug hunts go, Fox's *Alien* film trilogy provided fertile material for the imagination, as well as inspiring dozens of electronic games, including the Doom series. While Alien vs. Predator for the Jaguar console was arguably the most sincere interpretation of the subgenre, MicroProse could take the gameplay lead with Starship Troopers in early 1998.

Last year, MicroProse signed a licensing agreement with TriStar Pictures for the computer-game rights to the science-fiction actioner slated to open this July. Like the movie, Starship Troopers is based on the now-classic 1959 sci-fi novel by Robert Heinlein about a young volunteer who goes off to intergalactic war after his home city on Earth is destroyed.

Starship Troopers, the movie.

The movie is being directed by Paul Verhoeven of *Total Recall*, *RoboCop*, and *Basic Instinct* fame. Word is that the film will diverge greatly from Heinlein's examination on American mores and culture and concentrate on the war between Earth and the bugs.

That should be great news for TriStar, especially after the success of *Independence Day* last summer. But what of the computer game? As MicroProse is known for doing (see the Star Trek: Generations guided tour in this issue), expect some differences.

"We think what you'll see in the game will be closer to the book than what you'll see in the movie," says lead artist Rick Dimond. "There's a lot of stuff we can do that would be too expensive to film. We took some time to figure out what we could do with the property within the boundaries of the license, and it matches up pretty well with the movie."

Dimond says Starship Troopers will be a chase-view action game like MDK and Tomb Raider, with cooperative and wargame multiplayer options.

Reportedly, MicroProse plans four Starship Troopers games, but Dimond says the first one will revolve around the life of a grunt on an off-world station. From what we saw at MicroProse, you start off as just another space marine faced with thousands of mean, nasty, intelligent insects who are intent on exterminating humanity. They also have a penchant for sucking one's brains out one's skull just for fun.

Surrounding Dimond in his office at MicroProse are original diagrams for the different bug castes from Tippett Studios, responsible for many of the best dinosaur scenes in *Jurassic Park*. Next to the diagrams are some of Dimond's own initial interpretations of the insect race for the game. Like the Shadows in *Babylon 5*, these are big bugs, rendered to appear eight feet long on the screen. The difference is that there are a wide variety of bug races—from warrior to administrator.

While MicroProse will follow the movie by concentrating a great deal on the warrior variety in this real-time 3D game, Dimond says Starship Troopers will spend more time with some of the other castes as well.

"We'll definitely be working more with the other kinds of bugs in the game," he says. "One of the more intriguing things about the book that won't be in the movie are a host of other alien races. You're going to see some of them play a part in the game, too."

Dimond showed us initial designs for some of the human armaments and powered-armor suits, and they all bore a delightful resemblance to the futuristic marine milieu seen in James Cameron's *Aliens*.

As in MechWarrior 2, Starship Troopers will also encourage players to undertake specific missions to advance from level to level. "We want to put in thousands of bugs in our game levels," Dimond says. "You can have a great time blowing them away, but there's no way to kill them all before they get you in a firefight. You have to be smart enough to achieve your objectives and move on, not concentrate on kill ratios."

Again, like MechWarrior 2, you will rise in the ranks as you complete missions. With each success comes more authority and progressively larger commands.

At press time, MicroProse says Starship Troopers will be a Windows 95–native game that supports 16-bit color and at least 640-by-480 resolution.

—George T. Chronis

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TEEN AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Finding the Software At CES

Computer gamers visiting the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January may have thought game publishers had blown them off, but they were wrong. MicroProse, Accolade, and GT Interactive were all showing upcoming games that look great.

MicroProse

In addition to Star Trek: Generations and Magic: The Gathering, MicroProse demoed the latest build of X-COM: Apocalypse, with a number of exciting changes for the third installment of this popular series.

Accolade may add three more historical eras to Legends '98.

Thanks to a run-through by product marketing manager Tom Nichols, we got a look at the game's new Super VGA graphics and better computer AI. Troops under your command are now smart enough to duck when they get into tight situations. Other big changes: enhanced gravity effects and more scientists. Players can also choose whether they want to engage in real-time or turn-based combat, and this time around, they'll actually get to take the war to the alien's homeworld at the end of the game.

GT Interactive/ WizardWorks

The WizardWorks division of GT Interactive has two new publisher-approved level packages for Duke Nukem 3D and one for Quake, all due in March. Duke!ZONE 2 adds three new episodes and works with both the original release and the Atomic Edition. The three episodes are Arctic Assault, Alien Alley, and Monkey Shines, and each includes five levels. Meanwhile, Duke Extreme's highlight is an intuitive editor that allows players to alter and enhance all manner of character attributes, including strength, blood, speed, and intelligence. The package also comes with 50 additional Duke levels.

A follow-up to Duke!ZONE is one of WizardWorks' new titles.

Quake stalwarts are getting Q!ZONE, which comes with three hot-looking new episodes that have a selection of new monsters and weapons. Among the more interesting are a headless hulk and a green zombie with quick moves and a magnificently annoying squeal. New weapons will include a crossbow-like gun that fires silver stars.

The WizardWorks crew also laid out a whole release plan for 30 of its new GameWizards *Unlock the Secrets* interactive strategy guides. Intended as a replacement for bound tip books, these CD-ROMs are developed in conjunction with the original publishers and feature an MTV-esque host that shows players the finer points of each game. There's also an autorun feature that walks gamers through each level automatically. Detailed tips can be printed at any time on any subject.

GameWizards president Shel Mann says Duke 3D and Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh packages have already been released (with the Duke tips having sold more than 20,000 copies), and that NASCAR Racing 2 and Lords of the Realm II guides will be shipping soon. Mann says he also hopes to eventually take advantage of DVD-ROM technology so his guides can be on the same disc as the actual game, making it easy for players to switch between games and tips.

Accolade

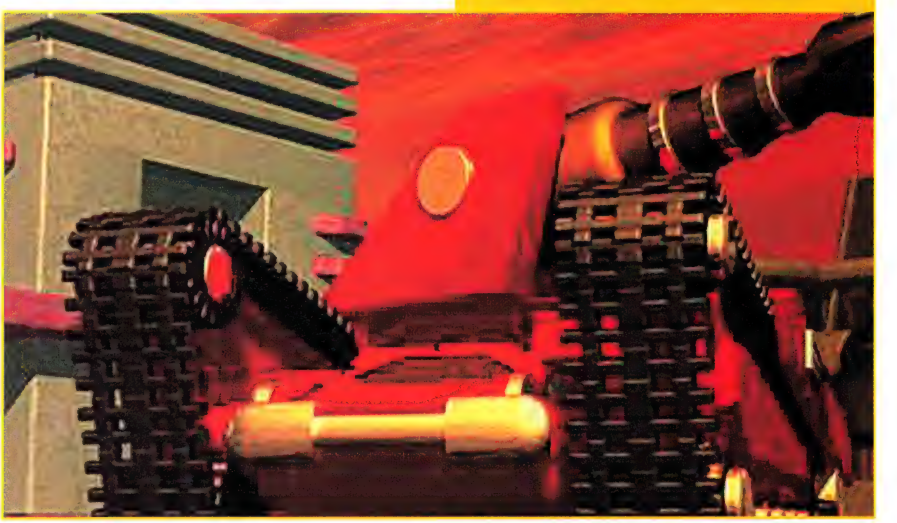
Accolade's claims to fame at the show were Hardball 6 and Legends '98. Public relations director Bill Linn confirmed that the company had sealed a major league baseball license to give Hardball real-life elements such as players, uniforms, and stats. It'll also have fully 3D stadiums. Expect a summer release.

As for Accolade's football game Legends '98, it was supposed to be released last December as Legends '97, but Linn says the publisher made a last-minute decision to delay it for eight months. Why? Accolade wanted to add multiplayer options. The game will support LAN, modem, and serial connections when it ships.

Right now, Linn says Legends will definitely ship with four historical NFL periods in which to play—1932, 1950, 1968, and 1998—but there is a vocal contingent of designers who would like to add three more. Stay tuned.

—George T. Chronis

X-COM: Apocalypse is now a real-time game as well as a turn-based game.



Online Gaming Services Exposed

By Daniel Morris

As the online gaming services emerge, PC Games will be keeping close tabs on the major players each month on this page. We'll let you know what games are currently available on each service, which are in the pipeline, and what treats the services are readying for the subscribers. You'll also find updated rates and the current subscriber base for each service. Now you'll have the skinny on which services are charging more or less, offering hits or dogs, and drawing customers or flies.

You'll also find the buzz on what's happening in these online communities in EyeBrowse. (What would the Internet Revolution be without some gossip on the block?)

EyeBrowse

• The hottest spot on the Web this month: Blizzard's Battle.net. Everyone in the world was talking about multiplayer Diablo and marveling at the impressive lack of lag or setup hassle. Or cost. That plopping noise you hear is the sound of sweat dripping from the commercial services.

• Subscriber information for Kali may not be available, but opinions about it sure are. There are tens of thousands of people playing games over Kali, and most of them are raving about it online. Of course, they rarely mention the fact that Kali is a technical man's game. Have you emulated an IPX network lately?

• The coolest thing on Thursday nights right now isn't Must-See TV, but Panzer General Online on TEN. TEN got ahold of five new scenarios, and the grognards convene to put them through their paces. Who needs *Seinfeld*?

• Forget fun...show us the money! Enteractive will be offering a $100,000 purse to be split among the winners of an online Picture Perfect Golf tournament scheduled for later this year. Mplayer has $5,000 up for the winning in its Quake tournament. Have we at last entered the strange and terrifying new world of the professional online gamer? Stay tuned.

• Well, the initial results for Clan PCGames are pretty embarrassing. Our multiplayer guru, Blade, can hold his own in any Dukematch or deathmatch on the Net, but the rest of us keep getting our asses kicked in woeful showings on TEN and Mplayer. But we're practicing, honest! After all, all work and no play makes us dull boys and girls, right? You'll know it's us by the PCG_ prefix on our screen names. Just take it easy on PCG_Daniel, OK? I'm sensitive...

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Exclusives: Duke Nukem 3D, Dark Suns	**Exclusives:** Q-Ball (when it comes out)	**Exclusives:** None (by design)	**Exclusives:** Jack Nicklaus 4 (when available)	**Exclusives:** None
Upcoming: Master of Orion II, C&C: Red Alert, Diablo, Shadow Warrior, Blood, Prey, Big Red Racing, Confirmed Kill, SimCity 2000, Total Mayhem, Falcon 4.0, Top Gun, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, CivNet	**Upcoming:** Q-Ball (Mplayer-only Quake modification), Diablo, War Wind, Panzer General (online only), Chaos Overlords, Star General, Deadlock, Battleship, Big Red Racing, Havoc, Monopoly, Risk, Scrabble, SimCity 2000	**Upcoming:** Not available at press time.	**Upcoming:** Jack Nicklaus 4	**Upcoming:** Kali works with most new games that are IPX-compatible.
Rates: Flat rate: $29.95/mo.; Hourly: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95/each additional hr.	**Rates: Flat rate: $29.95/mo. unlimited access, $299.95/yr. unlimited access; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo. ($1.95/addtl hrs.), $19.95/15 hrs. per mo. ($1.25/addtl hrs.) (10 free hrs. at sign-up)**	**Rates: $7.95/mo., $19/10 hrs., $34/20 hrs., $59/40 hrs. (5 free hrs. at sign-up)**	**Rates: No extra charge through AOL and CompuServe**	**Rates: $20 one-time fee**
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STEVE KLETT

Force-Feedback Follies

As a game enthusiast, The Player couldn't wait to get his hands on the new force-feedback joysticks that have been shown at all the recent trade shows. Finally, one arrived—CH Products' Force FX—and it was with great anticipation that he hooked it up to his PC.

Was the wait worth it? Was The Player's first force-feedback experience up to his expectations? You bet. Being a flight-sim addict—particularly WWII-vintage sims—the Force FX is The Player's ultimate game peripheral. The vibration of the stick, the shudder and shake as he fired his Mustang's 50-caliber guns in Fighter Duel, the G-force effects as he went into a tight turn or spin…all these things, supported by the Force FX, greatly enhanced Fighter Duel's realism. What a toy! (For an in-depth review of the Force FX, see page 103.)

And it's not bad with driving games either, as attested by The Need For Speed SE. The Player, a four-wheeler at heart, went offroading in his Viper, and the Force FX let him know in no uncertain terms that Dodge's best wasn't designed for that. For him, the Force FX's addition of shakes, rattles, rolls, and bumps and nudges in the thick of the race made revisiting his old favorite a new experience. Still, driving a car with a joystick felt unnatural, and The Player can't wait for force-feedback technology to appear in PC driving peripherals—it's on the way.

However, besides the current dearth of force-feedback games (many are on the way), there were still some big concerns nagging at the darkest reaches of The Player's mind as he blew away those pesky zeros in Fighter Duel. For starters, at a suggested retail price of $250, the Force FX is one expensive toy (street prices will likely run around $170).

Then there's the reliability question: How long will these sticks last? The noises coming from the Force FX are alarming at times, and the strength of the motor is quite impressive. How long can it dish out its punishment before wearing out? Only time will tell. CH Products is known for putting out durable, long-lasting peripherals; heck, The Player has abused his old Flightstick Pro for years now and it's still in first-rate condition. But every motor breaks eventually.

There's also the question of how far game companies are going to take this force-feedback immersion thing. We've got joysticks now, and vests that convey the thumps of incoming fire in action games. Steering wheels are coming. The Player can't help wondering what's next—and proposing a few ideas of his own.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

Thanks to force feedback, you can now get a sense of the effects of physics in games—but is that enough? Most popular games of the moment are violent, involving the infliction of particularly nasty deaths on your friends and strangers in multiplayer and online matches. What about pain? Sure, a force-feedback joystick can inflict some minor pain if you happen to let it rap you on the knuckles, but what about pain by design?

Yeah, that's the ticket—an electrifier peripheral for games that plugs into your computer and comes with electrodes to attach to your skin, emitting small electric shocks to represent painful moments in a game. Feeling the joystick rock back in his hand isn't enough for The Player when he's shot in a Quake deathmatch—a small amount of pain would really get the juices flowing. Of course, that pain should be amplified when The Player fries one of his supposed competitors with the Thunderbolt. And then there's the Nailgun possibilities to consider…

What about the sense of smell? Leisure Suit Larry 7's CyberSniff 2000 aside, the olfactory bulb is being ignored by today's games. The Player envisions a device filled with disparate "harmless" chemicals that games can be programmed to mix in real time to emit various odors associated with gameplay. Imagine creeping through Diablo's dungeons and suddenly catching a whiff of rotting carcasses, or being able to tell by smell what type of monster is lurking nearby (or perhaps is using the restroom you just crept through). On the happier side, imagine what the addition of smell could do for immersion in a graphic adventure game such as Myst.

What about devices that exude real fog, mist, or rain? (That could really clash with the electrifier.) And wind—yeah, wind—a massive fan plugged into your computer that will truly make the wind howl in the latest game! Cool!

[Editors' note: Once again, staff members were forced to apply some real-life force feedback to The Player's noggin to stop his delusional rantings; none of the products mentioned in the latter half of this column are even design specs on some engineer's desktop at this point. Or are they?]

As always, send your comments, thoughts, force-feedback ideas, and criticisms to ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

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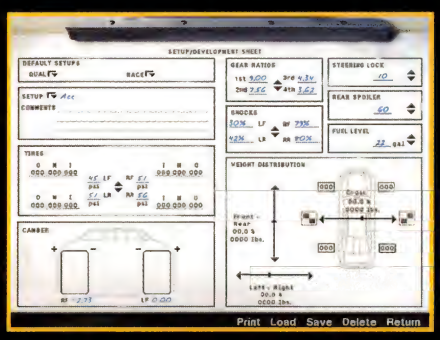

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THE OPPONENT

BLADE

Friends First, Enemies Later

Can you remember your first time? Everyone is supposed to. How did it feel? Was it good? The Opponent remembers his first time like it was yesterday. It was daunting and scary. Filled with apprehension, he wondered whether he'd be able to perform. What if it went wrong? Being laughed at for a crummy performance could damage him irrevocably.

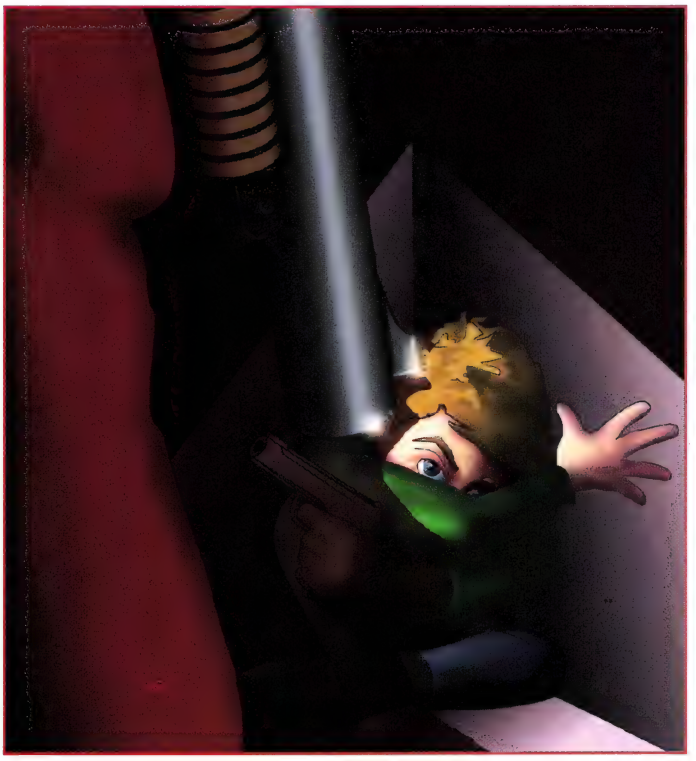
Not surprisingly, the preparation was carefully considered and planned, a date, time and place set. There seemed to be so much to remember, so much to make sure was right; the list of what to do and not to do ran rampant through his mind. He'd been fine when practicing in the calm quiet of his own bedroom, but this was different. He was no longer alone. There would be people watching, prying, even taking notes. This could be a defining moment in his life, and he knew it.

But he knew when the time was right. There was no pressure. He was ready. So, heart pounding in anticipation of these unknown pleasures, he connected.

And his online virginity was lost.

It was an exhilarating experience. Once the shock of realization of what he was doing had subsided, he was able to relax and enjoy himself. And enjoyment was available in abundance.

His partner in this venture was Doom. That made it easy because there was little talk. There were no awkward pauses while relationships were developed. It was just about getting down to the action. And what splendid, uninhibited action it was.



But things are more complicated these days. Buzzwords like community and interaction make the initial steps at once easier and more intimidating for the timid newbie. Now there's a word: newbie. Everyone was one once. But how quickly some people forget that fact.

In these days of community and interaction, there are also cliques. For the members of those cliques, the social interaction, the camraderie, and the simple knowledge that there are others like you out there is great. But breaking into the cliques and making your own way in the online world can be a frightening experience.

The online services, desperate to promote their sense of community, have made special areas available for newbies to congregate and take part. In the online world, the experienced, skillful gamers can dominate if not held in check. While it may not be much of a challenge, entering a recruit's Duke game on TEN armed with hundreds of hours of practice certainly has the potential to provide a quick-fix ego trip. It happens. Rankings certainly aren't at stake in the community-spirit effort to ensure that newbies aren't scared off by bully-boys, but bullies exist. I wonder if they realize the damage they could be doing to their prized hobby by scaring off potential opponents?

Online flight sims such as Warbirds seem particularly prone to the clique element. Hard-core fanatics band together in squadrons to fly against similarly minded groups. In pops a new recruit, and before he can say "Hi, guys," there are a bunch of aces on his six filling his sparkling new plane with lead. Is he going to return? Not in a hurry, or until he's found a bunch of mates to offer some welcome assistance.

When Peter Olafson reviewed Meridian 59 (Jan. 1996, page 111), it was something of a chore. That newbie position made it difficult to get going, and it was getting to a stage where the game could simply be dismissed as too inaccessible. But everything changed with the kind (albeit weighted) help of a veteran. Okay, so this guy had his own long-term agenda, but at least that agenda relied on encouraging newbies. And so that whole online world suddenly became a more pleasant place to visit.

The Opponent firmly believes that clans and squadrons and guilds make getting involved in an online community more appealing. But these groups should realize that they are perhaps the founding fathers of this new frontier and therefore have a responsibility to those who will follow.

For online gaming to work, it needs to have more people involved, but there seem to be those too set on their own agendas of power-tripping to see beyond their next kill. So to those people out there, just remember—you, too, were an online virgin once.

The Opponent can be found being nice to newbies under the moniker PCG_Blade wherever online games are played. As always, please send your comments to blade@pcgames.com.

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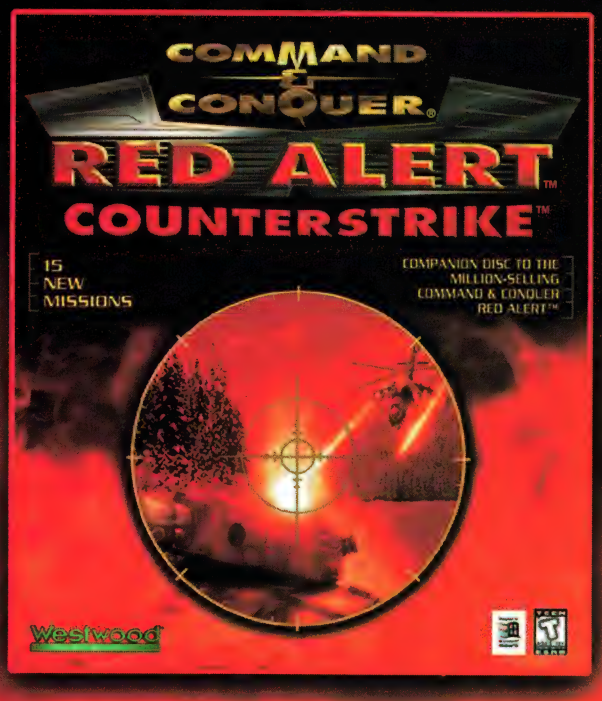

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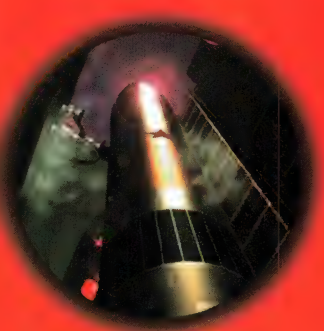

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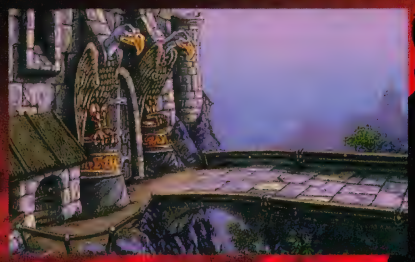

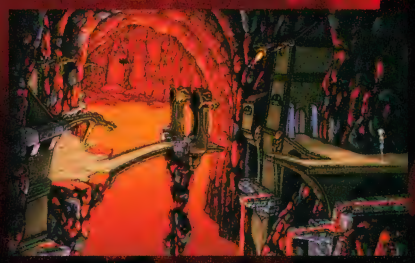

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In the age of the first-person shooter, is there still a place for traditional computer role-playing games? If so, where's the genre headed? We turn to some of the industry's fantasy giants to find out...

The forbidding world of Guardians of Destiny, a modern RPG.

Long Live the RPG

BY BARRY BRENESAL

COMPUTER FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES—RPGs, to their aficionados—have never been more popular to their fans, more challenging to their creators...and more under threat. That sounds like a contradiction, but in a culture where making money in any given field isn't enough—you have to make the *most* money—the traditional, computerized RPG is becoming a not-popular-enough species in danger of extinction.

Or is it? The answers vary according to the experts you speak with, and so do the fixes they suggest. *PC Games* recently solicited the opinions of the leading producer/creators of computer RPGs; some were hopeful, some weren't. Some are headed online; others shun multiplay, fancy graphics, even graphics at all. But most think RPGs have a place in the gaming world, even a strong place—if only players would forget those damned first-person "fantasy" shooters.

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A hardy band of travellers reaches an Ultima Online destination.

Pure RPG, Impure World

It's the difference between a fantasy role-playing universe, and Quake with ogres and rocket launchers. It's the distinction between an environment that lets your character make important decisions, and one where the only decision is whether to kill 1,001 rapier-wielding knights now or wait 10 seconds and end up as a thin layer of red paint on the dungeon walls and floor. Action/arcade games disguised as fantasy are selling big. But can the Real Thing—old-fashioned, fantasy role-playing games with all the trappings—still make it?

Louis Castle thinks so. The vice president of creative development at Westwood Studios doesn't believe any role players are fooled by shoot-'em-ups in fantasy garb...or satisfied by them, either: "Doom has short-circuited fantasy role playing and strategy, if you will. The dungeon-crawling experience has become an action/arcade game that isn't really a role-playing game. The emphasis is on running around a [game] shooting things. Unless you're a psychopathic mass murderer, there's not much of a role to play."

It's this absence of role playing, interacting with a fantasy-based environment in a fully assumed persona, that separates the hack-and-slash action/arcades from true RPGs. Demographically, the two groups are quite distinct. Chris Weaver, president and CEO of Bethesda Softworks, says his company's surveys reveal an audience with "a well-rounded education. They generally know more than the populace-at-large. They are not amused by something mindless that depends upon twitching finger response. That probably explains in part why we have a larger percentage of women playing RPGs than playing Nintendo or standard action games."

In fact, according to Bethesda's chief games designer, Bruce Nesmith, the action/arcades may even intensify the desire of fantasy role players for their kind of game. "I think fantasy gamers are begging for something with true role playing. The players haven't gone away; the companies have merely moved to markets other than RPGs for their business. If you go onto some of the major gaming bulletin boards for various online services, 50 percent of the comments are from people asking about Daggerfall. They're rabid, dying for something to play."

Perhaps. But the RPG market, while loyal, just isn't that large, and the costs of production mount all the time. "I perceive the fantasy market as having a high minimum yet definite upper threshold," says Steve Barcia, head games designer at MicroProse's Simtex Division (the folks who gave us Master of Magic and Master of Orion I and II). "It's easy to sell 50,000 copies of an RPG, but the limit is about 250,000. By comparison, sci-fi can do [something] really lousy—Metal Jacket, for example—or produce a Wing Commander [that'll sell anywhere] from 15,000 to 1,000,000 copies, which is why a lot of people are hesitant to get into the RPG market."

SSI president Chuck Kroegel winds another, more mournful theme that sounds like it came out of Wagner's "Twilight of the Gods." "RPG is just not as appropriate a genre for the computer as real-time strategy or action/arcade," he quietly declares. Significantly, SSI—the company that held the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons license for years—has no current plans to produce any RPGs in 1997.

"They really necessitate several human beings or one heck of an AI," Kroegel says. "What all of us have been doing over the years is generating artificial worlds and middling AI. Computer RPGs have been nothing more than an obstacle course, a fancy graphical adventure.

"What's always missing is the human element."

Bringing It to Life: Ultima IX

Kroegel puts his finger right on the problem—the computer's inability to truly simulate human interaction on a scale that brings an environment alive. Getting around this problem in one way or another is a magic trick that's tough to pull off successfully.

Perhaps one of the finest to succeed over the past 15 years has been Richard Garriott, founder of Origin Systems and creator of the famed Ultima series. Garriott managed the feat through a bold,

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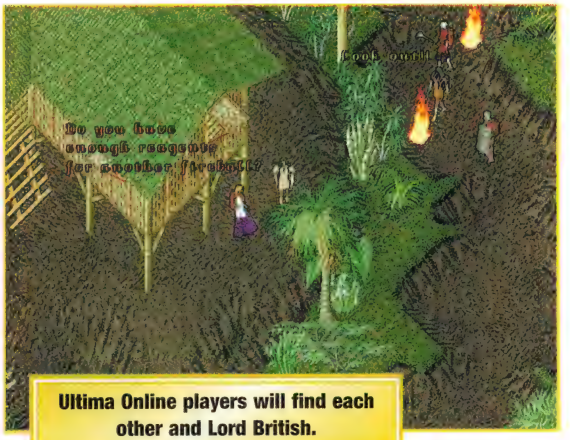

Ultima Online players will find each other and Lord British.

imaginative storyline and an intensely detailed physical environment. This combination works like the traditional magician's art of misdirection, taking your mind off canned character responses and focusing it on the things Ultima does well.

Ultima IX, says Garriott, will raise both of these elements to a still higher level. "It's called Ultima IX: Ascension," he explained. "The player's character, who has been in the series all along, will ascend beyond mortality in the final struggle with The Guardian." As in the last four Ultima games, Ultima IX will consider ethical questions normally regarded as beyond the pale for games in general, let alone the fantasy role-playing experience.

Ultima IX will also redress one chief complaint about its immediate predecessor, Garriott says: "We'll still be using the third-person perspective, but this time, it's because we want that sense of a full party traveling through the world." That's right: Ultima IX returns to Britannia and a multiple character party, with game pauses while you examine inventory. The absence of these features in Ultima VIII made it the least successful entry in the series.

But if Garriott throws out only tantalizing hints about Ultima IX's plot, he's more explicit about its display technology. "All our earlier releases in this series were tiled or bitmapped. Now we've created the entire world in true 3D—3D rolling terrain, structures, characters, monsters, items," he says. "We actually had this capability before, but the lack of resolution on home monitors and most video cards meant players couldn't see small, detailed objects like rings being removed from fingers. We'll have facial animations that weren't possible in Ultima VIII and ships drawn to scale, as your party will find out when you board."

Ultima IX's interface will also try to make handling its wealth of items a lot simpler. "Reagents are now in containers that automatically organize and optimize their contents," Garriott says. "There will be slots in a bag for each reagent, with its symbol and quantity easily available. A money purse will handle wealth, and key rings will automatically provide the proper key to enter a locked building if you have that key in your party. For the rest, Ultima IX will remain a go-anywhere, do-anything world that runs according to its own rhythms." Look for this release on your store shelves around Christmas '97.

A Sense of Wonder: Might & Magic VI

New World Computing is taking its Might & Magic series in a different direction, stressing visual excitement and interactivity over believable character interaction or a storyline with real-world overtones. "Keep it simple and keep it fun," says producer Jon van Caneghem.

"Might & Magic VI will be in hi-res, 16-bit color," he says. "It's got two engines. The indoor engine is somewhat like Quake's for higher definition and resolution, but it isn't designed for arcade speed. The outdoor engine is a height map engine, a more advanced version of the kind of thing you saw in Magic Carpet, offering perspective on landscape features like towns and volcanos. You'll be able to climb up a mountain and actually look down into the valley, and examine things from a distance."

The world of Daggerfall is large enough to engage players for weeks.

There will also be rendered, interactive scenes. In fact, interactivity is a word that's often on van Caneghem's lips when he talks about bringing the next Might & Magic to life: "Most of the game will no longer be texture-based. You'll be able to pick up items and hand them around. Expect more spells. Expect the ability to create and modify your own spells. And we'll have a much larger skill-based character system. There will be a lot more puzzles than in any of the series since Might & Magic II."

In Might & Magic V, the evil Sheltem was finally destroyed. He won't be back again, but there's plenty of evil to pose additional threats, and a plethora of exciting, colorful, drawn-to-perspective monsters for an extraordinary combat experience. "Battle will offer both turn-based and real-time options for your party, with the ability to reposition your party members—although we won't be sending them off in different directions," van Caneghem says. In other words, combat won't extend beyond a carefully defined area that makes it easy to handle.

However, the single biggest change in Might & Magic VI will be its use of a game clock. "Our previous games worked like books: you performed an action, and the next event occurred," he says. "Here, everything evolves in the environment, whether you're involved or not. Seasons change, people come and go. Your party's actions will actually modify the world on a much larger scale than before, because information is stored in a global database. You'll even be able to buy places of business and improve them." Might & Magic VI should be out in November 1997, with "at least two spinoffs using the same engine in the same universe, too."

Keeping It Fresh: Master of Magic II

MicroProse's Master of Magic combined resource management, lots of exciting elements, and a completely randomized world every time you replayed the game. Steve Barcia says with great relish that MOM II is letting him create a product that

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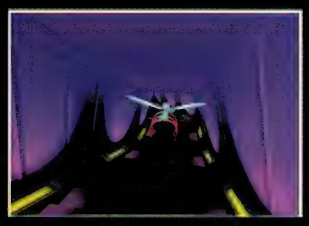

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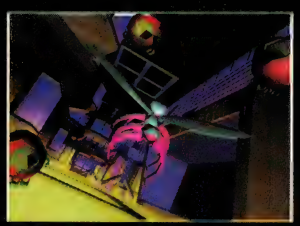

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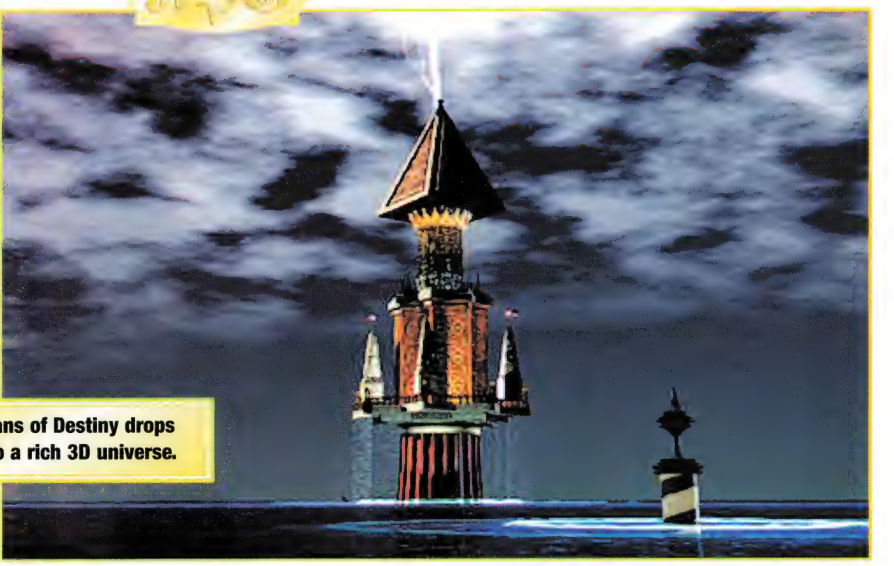
furthers his philosophy of fantasy-based role playing: "Give people lots of toys to play with. Winning conditions, for instance. In MOM I, you won by banishing all your opponents from the game. MOM II will offer three new ways of winning in addition to that."

Clearly, this game is still in formulation—not surprising, given its target date of spring 1998. A number of new options have already been locked into place, however. There will be at least six "planes of existence" to add to the two in MOM I, each with distinctive features. And there will be plenty of new spells—13 spell books in all. Some of these eight new books will result from combinations of the earlier, basic five, so you'll get previously available spells plus those that come only from working a combination of magical disciplines. You'll also be able to design your own spells—creating effects, designating area of impact, etc. Some spells will even let you design new monsters, and summon them.

Characterization will be broader, too. "Your character was immortal in MOM I, but in MOM II one of the options will be Mortality—the ability for the player to appear on the field of battle if he wishes," Barcia says. "Expect new heroes and hero types, too, along with networking and multiplayer options.

"We're still very much in the development stage, so not all of this may pan out," Barcia says. "But currently, we're hoping for a completely isometric world, rather like the combat scenes in MOM I."

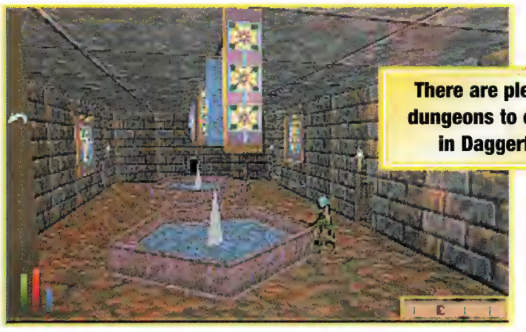


Guardians of Destiny drops you into a rich 3D universe.

Morrowind co-designer Ken Rolston says that Daggerfall had a vast system of behind-the-scenes factions; players simply weren't aware of it. "I'm a big fan of live-action role-playing games," he says, "and factions are a major part of that. In Morrowind, we will model a drama similar to what you would perceive as a player in that live-action scenario.

"We'll do this by adding a strategic/political game, sort of like the city states in late medieval Italy. The major computer-driven characters have different agendas that the player can plug into at various points. You as a player will rise through the ranks, rather like a mercenary captain of old. People in the land will gradually become aware of your actions—both for good and ill."

Daggerfall had three custom-designed cities and more than 1,000 cities created with a random geomorph designer. Morrowind will have 30 custom-designed cities, and the services and items offered in each will be significantly different. Guilds will be unique. Your character's level of achievement and relationships with individual non-player characters (NPCs) will also determine what information, spells, and items are available to you.



There are plenty of dungeons to explore in Daggerfall.

"We'll be enhancing the role of dialogue significantly," Rolston says. "Expect to be able to taunt someone in battle, intimidate them, or demand they surrender. In non-combat situations you'll be able to admire, menace, and court NPCs. A lot of information will get passed about as rumor, depending upon how well-known and liked you are by a given faction. Your ability to retrieve and utilize this information will be as important as your ability to grow a character who quests successfully."

The look of Morrowind will also receive a facelift: expect full Super VGA, 640-by-480 resolution, 256 colors. Target date: spring 1988.

More Interactivity: The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall was an effort to create an immense, epochal RPG world that seemed to stretch to the borders of one's imagination. The challenges for The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind will be to individualize that universe so that each place and moment is distinctive and individual characters can have a lasting impact on the landscape.

Simplicity Among Complexity: Guardians of Destiny

Looks are also important to Westwood's Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny, but so is simplicity: Castle wants to stress action over resource tracking and other mundane tasks. "Guardians of Destiny will have excellent opponent-based AI, great graphics, and a compelling storyline," he explains. "It has an epic quality with a vast countryside, lots of action, spells and weapons, good and bad guys. It's a living world. But we want to keep all the fun of the original Wizardry games with none of the mess—map building, statistics tracking, etc.

"You'll gain party members but you won't have to worry about controlling their actions, for example. Each of your adventurers will have their own agenda, and they will join, fight or leave at appropriate junctures. This will allow you to concentrate on your own character's responses during real-time battle, letting the computer handle the AI for other party members and all monsters."

In some ways, Guardians comes closest to its action-shooter nemeses. "Guardians of Destiny will have a true 3D world with 3D movement—a high-end Quake engine, if you will," Castle states. "Its cinematic sequences will be fully interactive, letting you initiate physical combat and cast spells. Expect more than 4 hours of Super VGA computer graphics at 15 frames/second, full-screen, and 80 hours of gameplay."

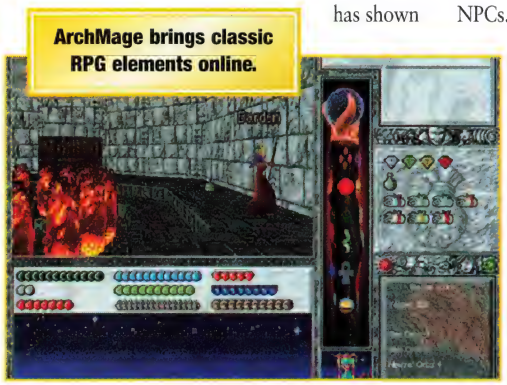
Greater detail, a sense of wonder, more interactivity, more options, simpler controls: these are the challenges the major RPG producers have set themselves for their next releases. But there's a sixth

challenge in the distance, looming large enough that some developers privately wonder whether it won't blot out the RPG sun as we know it—multiplayer online RPGs.

Standalone vs. Multiplayer

"Strategy is essentially alive and well with online games," Caroline Parker, producer of ArchMage, declares. "Our feeling is that the online multiplayer game actually represents the best chance for computerized RPGs to come into their own. It offers a sense of community and a product that has an unlimited shelf life. As long as it's fun, people will keep playing."

Certainly they get around the issue of limited AI, but multiplayer online games pose their own series of problems to the RPG producer. "No one has shown me the way to do a real-time game in a party with depth," says van Caneghem. "It feels like Doom with multiple players. Yet anything multiplayer on a computer has to be real-time; there's no other way. You can't wait on endless decisions from each member of your party."



ArchMage brings classic RPG elements online.

David Whatley disagrees with this evaluation. He's the CEO of Simutronics Corporation, which markets three of the most successful online multiplayer games—GemStone, Modus Operandi, and DragonRealms. "Most of the RPG competition isn't willing to take risks," he says. "They don't usually create a compelling social environment. This works to our advantage." To Whatley, it's the depth of fantasy environment that drives classic role playing. His three games offer more than a dozen professions, hundreds of skills and spells, thousands of items, many completely individualized cities and villages, social houses, secret organizations, and training facilities.

What they lack is graphics. These games are text-based. Is that a drawback? Their players would claim that the text gives much greater reign to an individual player's imagination, and lets gamemasters change and control the environment in a detailed, spontaneous fashion that graphical interfaces simply don't allow. "We can generate a lot more interesting material for the player a lot faster with text-based than graphics-based material," Whatley says. "Since players are paying for the experience to be dynamic, new, not the same thing they saw last week, games like GemStone and DragonRealms provide an advantage."

ArchMage (which was developed by Simutronics for Viacom NewMedia) is graphics-based, but it's more action-oriented and lacks the depth of Simutronics' other products. For a graphics-based online game that offers depth of environment, your best bet may be Ultima Online, currently scheduled for a spring debut.

Ultima Online offers the standard Ultima fantasy, pseudo-medieval environment, but with a difference: most of the people you encounter will be players like yourself, rather than computer-driven NPCs. "I've tried very hard to put compelling stories into the game," says Garriott, though he admits "you can't have a single plot thread for 2,000 to 3,000 people. It has to be much more open-ended. Yet, I wasn't willing to relinquish an overall world problem that people could get involved with inside the game." For those who don't want that level of involvement, it's possible that there will be non-combat-oriented professions and activities, just as there are in the Simutronics products already discussed. (For example, DragonRealms supports an "empath" class that can heal wounds but can't fight.)

Toward the Future

So is there life at the end of the computer RPG tunnel? As the comments above show, many RPG developers are still willing to commit vast resources to supporting the market with the kind of games it has loved and played for a long time. Even SSI's Chuck Kroegel is philosophical about things: "There are cycles and fads. Perhaps computer RPGs will stage a comeback."

A more optimistic note is sounded by Garriott. He disagrees that this isn't a good time for RPGs. "I think the spread of high-quality fantasy products is much better than it was in the last three years. I believe Diablo and Unreal—which aren't fantasy role-playing games—will [help] bring players back to the fantasy genre.

"Genre imitation is just cyclic. Some companies spend all their time chasing hot markets while others design innovative products and build genres. Look at what happened after Wing Commander III. Suddenly, many companies tried the interactive movie route, and most of them failed.

"But the Kilrathi are still around. And so is Ultima's Avatar." ■

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Getting harder to tell first-person shooters apart? Well, Outlaws is one you won't mistake for anything else. See how this wild romp through the Wild West brings style, substance, and story to the action genre.

OUTLAWS

The Spaghetti Western Revisited

By Daniel Morris

A loner stands at the gate of a dusty Gold Rush town. His coat flaps around him in the whipping desert wind, his features hidden in the shadow cast by the brim of his hat. He is a stranger, an outsider...a hero.

Sound familiar? It's the setup of just about every Hollywood western ever made. And it's the image that inspired LucasArts' Outlaws, a first-person ode to the legends of the West and the unique brand of cinematic masterpieces they gave us.

"We pride ourselves on supplying a good story with this game," says project leader Daron Stinnett. "We're giving players the opportunity to play a Clint Eastwood–type character in a spaghetti western....We're bringing that fantasy to life."

With a tip of the cowboy hat to Clint, the Duke, and Sergio Leone, LucasArts has infused the increasingly uninspired world of first-person action with new life. The idea behind Outlaws is not merely to provide gamers with yet another cookie-cut forum for carnage. The idea is to give them a fully realized Old West environment full of crafty enemies who are interested in their own self-preservation—along with laying you out under an ox skull.

You star as James Anderson, an ex-marshal set on erasing the dark forces corrupting the town of Sanctuary. The action will take you from the town itself to surrounding canyons, sawmills, a ride aboard a moving train, and finally, to the ranch hideout of archvillain "Gentleman" Bob Graham, a ruthless railroad baron whose henchmen hold the town hostage. More importantly, this bastard has murdered your wife and kidnapped your daughter.

Speaking of dark forces, it's the Dark Forces engine that powers Outlaws, along with the INSANE engine that fueled Rebel Assault II. Those of you who saw your way to victory as a lone Rebel taking on a whole Death Star figured out pretty quickly that stealth and wiles were necessary components to success. Outlaws is no different: It will require a "headsy" player who can take advantage of cover, use structures and walls defensively, and sneak around undetected to get the drop on bad guys. In short, it's striving to be the thinking man's action game.

"Outlaws makes you think about how to take guys out," says programmer Stephen Shaw. "The whole point is to get away from the Doom style of play."

That means such dishonorable things as sniping will be part and parcel of success. One tactic you'll want to perfect is finding a second-story window with a strategic view of a street and busting out the window to create a sniper position. Rifles and telescopic sights make snipers a deadly reality in the streets of Outlaws. Similarly, if you're able to sneak up on an unsuspecting enemy, you should feel no compunction about shooting him in the back. After all, he'd do it to you.

Enemies are smarter than they were in Dark Forces. They will hide. They will sneak up on you. They will use whatever cover they can find. They fight dirty. This isn't to say that things won't dissolve into all-out, lead-flinging chaos from time to time: There will be plenty to sweat over. But the shootouts in Outlaws are intended to be just that—

OUTLAWS

The Spaghetti Western Revisited

There's no honor among outlaws. Take your kills any way they come.

Rather than set up Outlaws as a fairly standard "whoever gets the biggest gun first wins" type of deathmatch, its designers have taken care to make the environments as elaborate and tricky as possible, allowing for plenty of innovation and underhandedness in the heat of battle. To triumph in multiplayer combat, tight nerves will get you farther than a tight trigger finger. With ammo and medical bags very hard to come by, you'll need an extra step to best your opponents.

Sorry, podna...

Now this is what I call a Gat.

shootouts, between individuals concerned with keeping their skins. With very limited ammunition (you're using 1800s technology, after all), it'll be important to make your shots count.

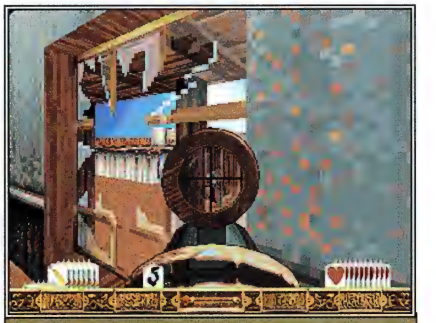
The violence will be golden, however. Shooting a villain in front of a window could make the unfortunate soul go flying backward through it. Shotguns, rifles, and even a Gatling gun can add fearsome firepower. And if it's hectic you want, it's hectic you get when the action shifts indoors. With plenty of places to play hide-and-seek, you never know if some mangy varmint is crouching behind a bar or bookcase.

Unlike Dark Forces, Outlaws was designed from the ground up with multiplayer and network support in mind. Deathmatches will reward the smart and punish the obvious—and will certainly fuel the debate between "sniping" players and the guts-and-glory types who detest them. (For more on this controversial practice, see this month's Face-off.)

For those desiring a little more variety than straight-up deathmatching, LucasArts has added twists like Capture-the-Flag (played by two teams from opposing forts) and a game called Secret Document, wherein one team seeks to safely escort a character bearing a secret document across town while the other team looks to assassinate him.

James, poised to take on the sinister forces lurking in the sleepy town of Sanctuary.

In keeping with the finest traditions of Leone westerns, the villains are equal parts bad and ugly. Along with the dapper kingpin Gentleman Bob, James will cross paths with such nefarious characters as the stogie-chomping madam Bloody Mary and the malevolent dentist Dr. Death. There are 12 villains in all, and each employs a gang of shifty-eyed scoundrels to put you six feet underground.



With a telescopic sight from an upstairs window, you can take sniping to new levels.

Break out windows and set yourself up with a nice sniper's nest.

With ambitions set on a high-horse opera, LucasArts has added a breathtaking cinematic element to Outlaws. Hand-drawn animation forwards the plot as James works his way closer to Gentleman Bob. Each scene is played out in the stylistically operatic filmmaking style of Sergio Leone epics, full of sweep and flair—the game as mythical Greek drama and morality play. James appears as the living incarnation of Vengeance, eager to take on Hell itself if it means exacting retribution on those who wronged him.

This is one first-person shooter that won't lack for personality. With fleshed-out villains, immersive environments, dazzling cinematics, and an emphasis on smart gunfighting, Outlaws looks to be a big step forward in the evolution of the first-person action genre, and well worth a fistful of dollars. ■

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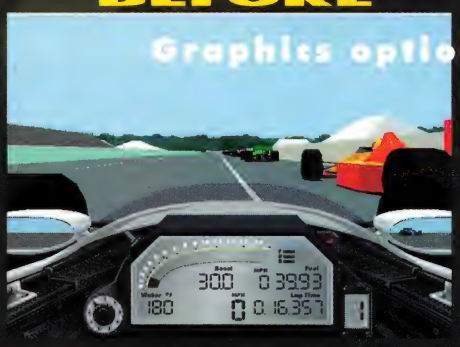

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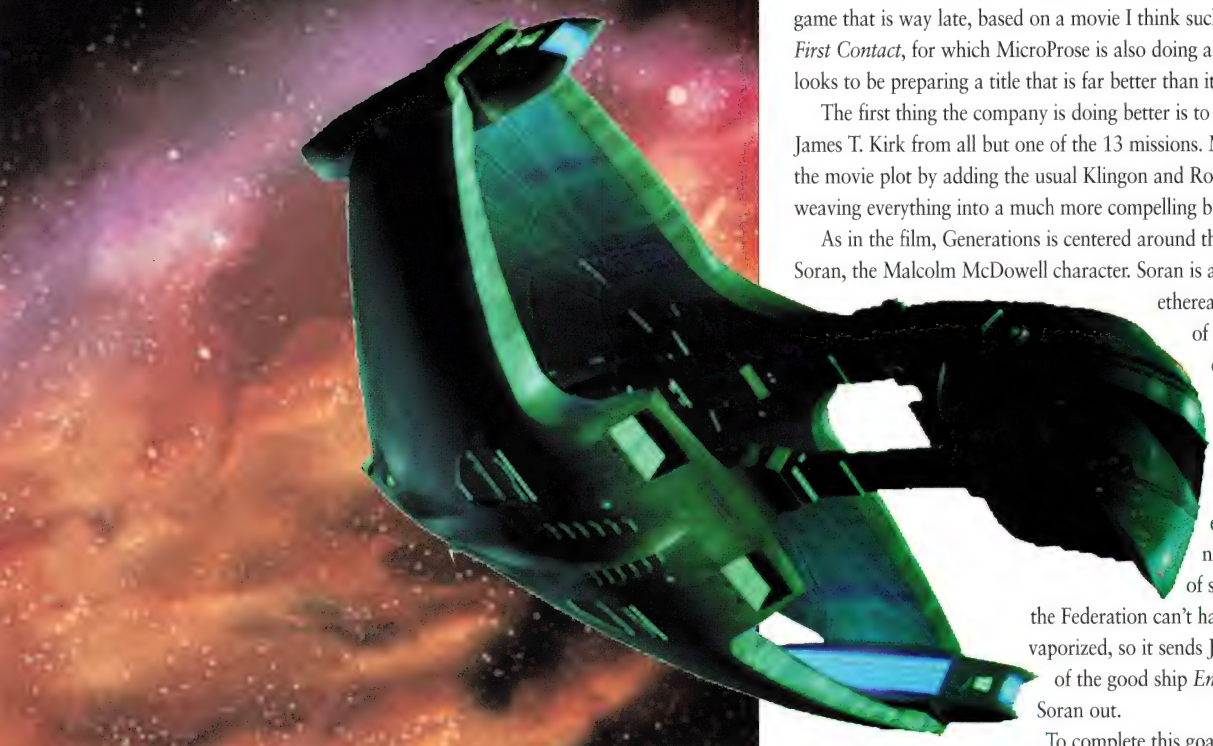
INTERGRAPH

MicroProse Fine-Tunes Its TNG Franchise

STAR TREK GENERATIONS

You can't judge a game by looking at its movie. This adventure takes a sleepy idea to warp speed—engage!



By George T. Chronis

Let's get one thing straight: Star Trek: Generations is not Doom Trek—reports from last year's E3 to the contrary. Yes, 60 percent of the game is now a first-person 3D environment, but if you're determined to blast away, you're going to lose.

Why? Because we're talking *Star Trek*, and that's the way Paramount Pictures and MicroProse (the company formerly known as Spectrum HoloByte) want it. Peaceful, brotherly contact with other species is the legacy that series founder Gene Roddenberry demanded, and most *Trek* zealots will probably agree.

Although it's executed much differently, think of Star Trek: Generations as an extension of Star Trek: The Next Generation "A Final Unity" from 1995. Even without a film tie, that game provided a story that easily ranked with some of the best episodes from the series, albeit in a third-person, adventure-exploration format.

Star Trek: Generations extends the adventure-exploration element with two notable differences: the new 3D environment and a tie-in to the second-to-last *Star Trek* movie.

Yes, like a lot of people, I think that movie sucked. And yes, this is a game that is way late, based on a movie I think sucked. (Unlike *Star Trek: First Contact*, for which MicroProse is also doing a game.) But MicroProse looks to be preparing a title that is far better than its source material.

The first thing the company is doing better is to banish legacy parasite James T. Kirk from all but one of the 13 missions. MicroProse is adapting the movie plot by adding the usual Klingon and Romulan suspects and weaving everything into a much more compelling background story.

As in the film, Generations is centered around thwarting the activities of Soran, the Malcolm McDowell character. Soran is a junkie addicted to the ethereal pleasures of a little slice of the universe, independent of the space-time continuum, called the Nexus. Being brilliant and resourceful, he knows he can attract the Nexus entry point by setting off novas in a select number of star systems. Naturally, the Federation can't have billions of its citizens vaporized, so it sends Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the good ship *Enterprise*, to root old Soran out.

To complete this goal, there are three main sections of the game. Players start off third-person in the *Enterprise*'s Stellar Cartography center with Picard and Commander Data. Based on long-range sensor scans of the 10 available star systems, you instruct Picard to order the *Enterprise* to the system that sensors and/or game hints suggest has the best chance of containing Soran.

Thirteen missions, 10 star systems—that's right, expect a few return

In the Star Trek: Generations game, Nexus junkie Soran gets a lot more help from the Klingons, Romulans, and other races than in the movie.

visits, according to lead artist and game designer Earl Otus.

Once you enter a star system, you get to scan it using much more accurate short-range sensors. But Otus says players should choose wisely before sending the *Enterprise* to a different star system. Wrong choices incur a time penalty that gives Soran a better chance of completing his plans. If the location looks promising, however, the game shifts into first-person mode.

Producer Simon Ffinch says there will be multiple away missions as Picard, Commander Riker, and Data in this portion of the game. Other characters will get single missions, including a Klingon infiltration mission for Lt. Commander Worf and a Romulan infiltration mission for Counselor Troi—an idea based on an actual *TNG* episode, "Face of the Enemy."

These first-person missions are much improved over their third-person Final Unity predecessors. Although phasers are standard issue, there's a reason the stun setting is standard as well, Ffinch says.

"This is a *Star Trek* universe, and you can't go around shooting everything up," he says. "The idea is to have people go out, discover important information and items, and fend off the bad guys. You can go and vaporize Romulans and Klingons with your phaser all you want, but you'll never pick up the items they carried, and thus never finish the game."

MicroProse is giving the Romulans and Klingons a much larger role to play in Star Trek: Generations as cohorts of Soran. Although both races are not allies per se, they do aid Soran to further their own ends.

While running into Romulans and Klingons on away missions will be pretty common, both empires provide the basis for the game's third major section, space combat.

Final Unity veterans will remember that that game's tactical combat controls were fairly klunky and difficult to master. Otus points out that the concept has been streamlined significantly, leading to a much more elegant interface. Targeting and maneuvering are much improved, as are exterior shots of Romulan warbirds and Klingon battlecruisers.

In general, MicroProse staffers are spending a lot more time and effort on the look and control responsiveness in Star Trek: Generations. Computer renderings of ship exteriors and interiors seen in cut scenes are looking as good as anything else on the market today. More importantly, they compare well with Interplay's competing Starfleet Academy. On the whole, MicroProse is close to simulating the rich fluidity of movement and image quality we expect in a feature film—and, we dare say, succeeding a great deal better at it than Paramount did in the *TNG* scenes from *Generations*.

"We thought we could take a lot more footage from the movie for cut scenes," Ffinch says. "But we discovered we couldn't use most of it and had to create a lot more material on our own."

It may be taking a while to get Star Trek: Generations out the door, but unlike some developers who pride themselves on their movie licenses, MicroProse is spending the time getting the gameplay right. If all goes well, the finished product should thrill Trekkers and gamers alike.

The central hub of the game is Stellar Cartography, which offers a selection of planets and missions to explore...

... or can just as easily be filled with hostile warships waiting to blow the *Enterprise* away.

Sometimes quick target acquisition and termination is the order of the day.

But in most cases, if you vaporize that Romulan, you won't find out what he's carrying, and not having that item will hinder you from completing the game.

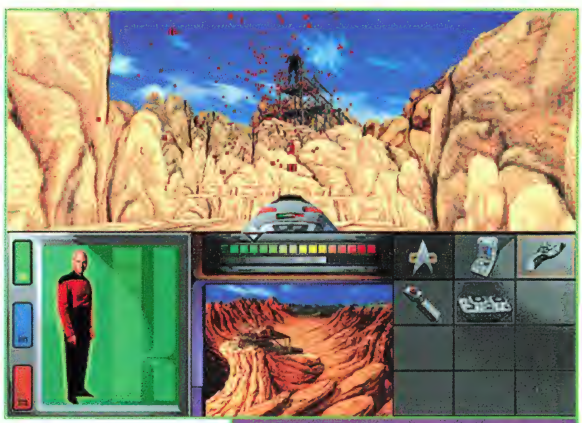
Wait a minute—those ugly pukes weren't with Soran in the movie! Actually, the Chodak first appeared in "A Final Unity." If you played that game, you know to watch them closely.

If you remember your *TNG* episodes, Data can't swim. So getting him across to that island in one of his away missions won't be easy.

Run Like Hell

Just as in the television series, Troi gets her own Romulan infiltration mission in Star Trek: Generations.

How honorable: Worf gets to put on the Klingon warrior uniform once more to infiltrate a Klingon base.



As in the movie, the climax with Soran comes on that rocky plateau.

Surprise visits to the bridge of a Klingon Bird of Prey are never well-received.

Even that overweight dude with the bad rug gets his own mission in Star Trek: Generations.

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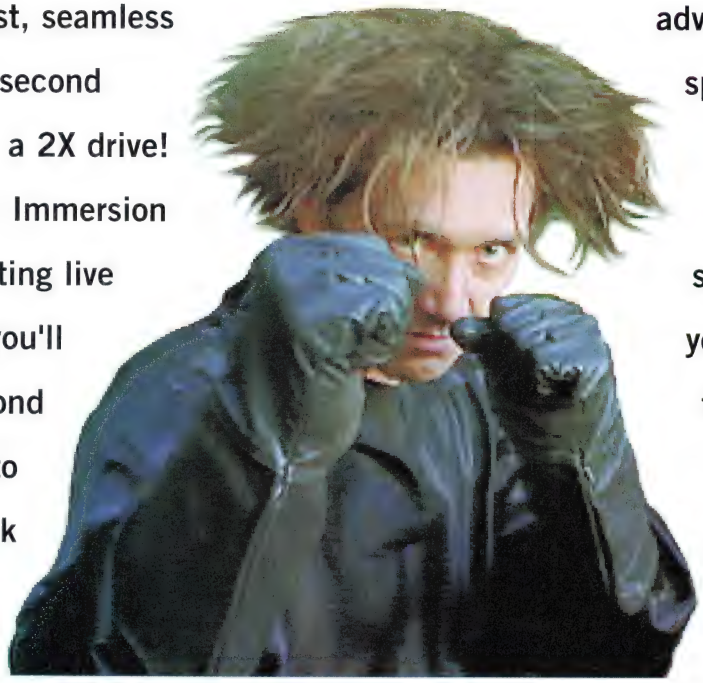

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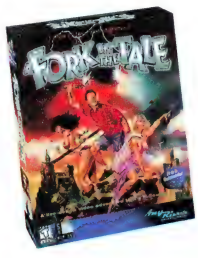

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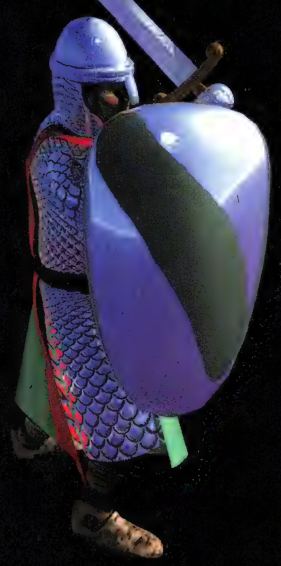
SNEAK PEEK

Myth

By Rob Smith

Braveheart-style battles in blood-soaked real-time 3D



Rob Smith (Warrior)
"Macildun's only words on returning exhausted to Tyr from a long campaign in the East to find half the city burning after a raid by pirates from Leix were 'Show me the way to Leix.'"

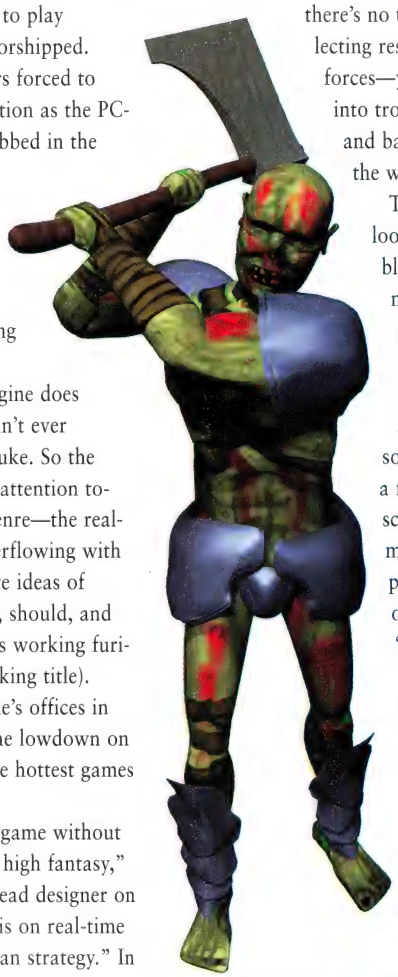
You can name your troops and join the carnage if you wish.

It wasn't a fight unless everyone lost a limb.

By that rare breed that combines Mac ownership and the need to play games, they were worshipped. No more were Mac users forced to watch in jealous admiration as the PC-owning fraternity got gibbed in the realms of a Doom deathmatch. The Mac got Marathon; Bungie Software got god status.

Now, Bungie's creating games for the PC, and while that Marathon engine does some decent things, it ain't ever gonna beat Quake or Duke. So the company has turned its attention toward the latest vogue genre—the real-time strategy game. Overflowing with creative and very definite ideas of what these games could, should, and would contain, Bungie is working furiously on Myth (the working title). *PC Games* visited Bungie's offices in the Windy City to get the lowdown on what could be one of the hottest games of the year.

"It's a fantasy-based game without all the clichés of typical high fantasy," explained Jason Jones, lead designer on the project. "The focus is on real-time tactical battles rather than strategy." In essence, this means that there's no time wasted collecting resources to build forces—you're straight into troop movement and battle strategy from the word go.



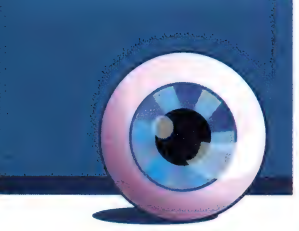
To this end, the look, feel, and sheer bloody realism of hand-to-hand melee and missile combat are presented in a surprisingly intense manner sure to stir interest among Quake fans looking for an alternative source of bloodshed. "We want a feel like the *Braveheart* battle scenes," said Jones. At that moment, as artist Robert McLees played out a battle, the entire office heard the excited cry of "Hey, cool—intestines!"

On screen, a Dwarven grenade exploded in a rank of Warriors, scattering arms, legs, heads, and associated internal organs over a blood-soaked hillock. Gore, blood, dismembered limbs, and heaps of bodies are high on the list of priorities to be included in this project. Plenty of time, effort, and energy have already been invested in ensuring a high body count and an amusing use of limbs and other sundry objects left strewn on the battlefield.

That's not all. There are blood-stained battlefields, line-of-sight combat over detailed, true 3D light-sourced terrains, and—straight from Bungie's in-house development document under the heading "Shit That Rocks"—"screaming little guys on fire setting other little guys on fire."

The 20 unit types—10 each for the Light and Dark sides of the battle—all have very distinct combat variables that are set and tested through the use of a tag editor. Hit ratios, damage amounts, and strike rates can be adjusted using the fairly straightforward editor, saved, and then given a gameplay test without the need to rewrite chunks of code.

For the forces of The Light, Warriors fight in trained ranks, Dwarves lob exploding grenades, and the fir'Bolg provide the missile support with arrows. These creatures will be joined by Warlocks, Berserks, Giants, and Griffins as development continues. For the side of The Dark, Ghols fight with cleavers and carry their victims' heads, undead



Dori –(Dwarf)
"Hours after the fall of Stoneheim, the dwarves defending Myrgard collapsed the barbican, entombing ten thousand of their number behind as many tons of shattered rock."

Savvy use of terrain can make all the difference.

Wights shamble into enemy formations and then explode with devastating effects, and the Thrall are slow, plodding undead who still put up a good fight in the heat of battle. Eventually, Vampyrs, Trow, and Myrmidons will swell these Dark ranks.

For a story, Bungie has been quick to dismiss any concept of traditional fantasy. No young hero will grow up to save the world; no Excalibur; no elves with bows or dwarves with hammers. You fight as The Light in the single-player game, and you'll battle over 25 scenarios covering 10 chapters that tell the tale of the Fallen Lords. Along the way a number of special items, relics, and weapons will be used to swing the balance of battle.

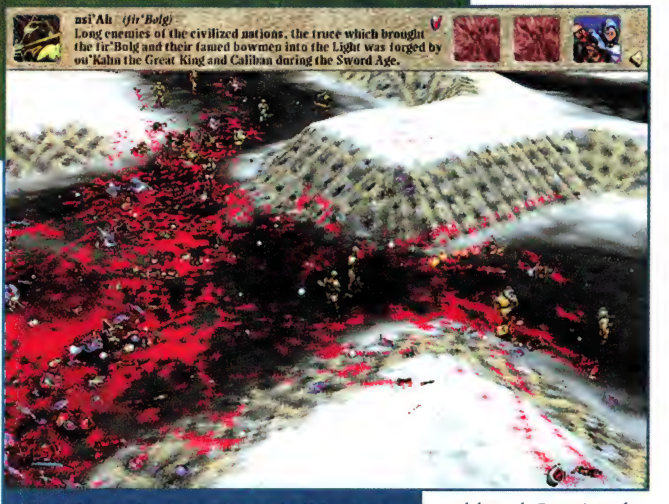
Troops can be assigned to different formations. Here, a squad of Thralls forms a wedge.

Battle locations are being developed using a nifty 3D terrain modifier. Maps are drawn in Photoshop, which offers a tremendous array of shades and styles, and then laid on top of the map editor. This editor is then used to pull up certain areas to create numerous varied terrain levels over the battlefield.

By skirting the common method of tile-based landscapes, and with the flexibility of the elevations, Myth's battlefields will be some of the most realistic ever. Archers at the top of hills will have a significant advantage, whereas Dwarves at the bottom, attempting to throw their grenades up, could well see their devices rolling back down toward them. Obviously, proper use of terrain is vital to success in battle.

An engine based on the Java scripting language allows simple development of varied gameplay elements whenever they strike the Bungie crew. Roving, swirling camera angles pan over the battlefield, providing a great field of vision to take in events as they unfold. Simple one-key commands, combined with mouse clicks to move units, make putting troops in position very straightforward. A range of attacking and defending formations has already been built in, and with a swift swish of the mouse as you direct troops, you can ensure that they are facing the right direction. Again, this is part of the tactics. Leave a line of Warriors facing one way, and they won't react to creatures sneaking up behind them until it's too late.

Backed by active panning stereo sound, the lapping of water on a shore, the flash of an arrow as it flies to a target, and the explosions of those damn Dwarf grenades all add to the sense of involvement in this 3D environment.


nsi'Ah –(jir'Bolg)
Long enemies of the civilized nations, the truce which brought the Jir'Bolg and their famed bowmen into the Light was forged by ou'Kahn the Great King and Caliban during the Sword Age.

There's no shortage of gore in this game.

Multiplayer elements are crucial to Myth's development. Bungie's MetaServer will act as a central area for players to meet, from which they can go off to play over the Internet on their own without requiring a link with the MetaServer. A wide variety of scoring statistics will offer ample food for discussion in the post-battle slanging match.

Internet play will also be cross-platform, bringing Mac and PC users together. By transferring commands only, with no need to send map information from machine to machine, Myth should retain a low bandwidth requirement. In addition, the single-player game will be artificially slowed so that there will be no noticeable difference when playing multiplayer.

Of course, the MetaServer service is going to be free. With the tag and map editors due to arrive soon after the initial game release, longevity and replayability are an integral part of Myth.

We did get to play Myth during our visit, but it is still some distance from completion. To coin that now over-used phrase, it's going to be released "when it's done." That will hopefully be some time in the summer, although Bungie refuses to be held to even a tentative release schedule.

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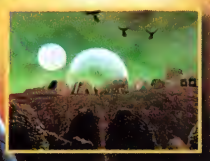

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–Happy Puppy

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–Computer Gaming World, UK / Five Stars

256-COLOR SVGA DISPLAYS. *WINDOWS 95 CD-ROM*

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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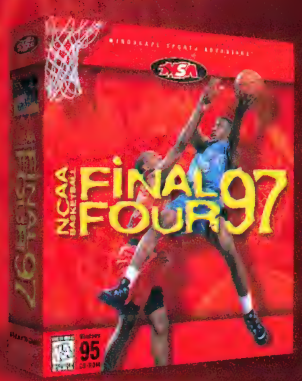

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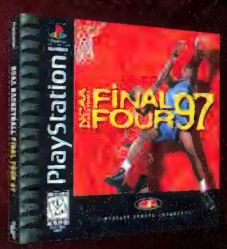

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GAME OF THE MONTH

Master of Orion II: Battle at Antares

Galactic godsend

By Peter Olafson

PC GAMES A LIST

Ouch! There goes another homeworld: 14 million souls and 400 turns worth of glistening technology gone in a few puffs of oily smoke. And here I am, grumbling, but still coming back for more punishment.

That's the best part about Master of Orion II, the sequel to MicroProse's classic turn-based strategy game: It's so gloriously, *achingly* difficult—and so plain fun, even when you're getting your clock cleaned—that you can't help but come back.

It's a splendid conflagration of exploration, resource management, diplomacy, research, and war. You start out with a single hospitable planet and technology that amounts to little more than survival skills, and try to become (in the language of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*) a Master of the Universe.

That's at once simple—the game is controlled ultra-intuitively with the mouse—and complex. You'll eventually bump into up to seven neighbors, and you'll have to keep your friends close and your enemies closer. A staggering number of military and environmental improvements can be researched. To keep the money rolling in and your people's stomachs full, you'll have to badger and barter, spy and sabotage, and assess just how far the other side can be pushed.

That's not too far. Before long, you'll have to send out the ships—scout to battleship—and fight the good fight. Even at the lowest of five difficulty levels, I found enemies eager to make unreasonable demands and follow them up with unreasonable and perpetual displays of force. The fighting turns out to be great fun, being less like chess and more like supervising a 2D space battle.

Strategic space combat with beautiful graphics.

MOO II has its share of rogue elephants: the Guardian who watches over the precious Orion system, a Space Eel, and the Antarans who (optionally) may make erratic appearances to pound a colony or two to a bloody pulp.

Decide which structures to build to help the welfare of your colony.

And my friends? Well, in one game, my closest ally accused me of stealing his technology and turned his back on me. I'd been framed. But by whom?

I was also tickled to find that the election to galactic high office is in the final release. (Man, I might even have gotten elected if I hadn't done the "ethical" thing and abstained.) That gives the game a personal stamp—a validation by others based on the specifics of your performance—that you just don't get anywhere else.

The Elerion Empire has finally defeated the Orion Guardian
Experts speculate the Elerion scientists has leapt light-years into the

GNN—Galactic Network News keeps you in the know.

Multiplayer mode, while a bit slow, is a kick. You can play on a single machine, via a null-modem or modem link, over a network, or through TEN software that comes on the CD. The only thing missing is Internet play for the non-TEN masses.

I could quarrel with the odd detail here and there. The loads from CD-ROM are sometimes lengthy, considering MOO II needs a whopping 75MB of hard-disk space. Volunteer mercenaries are just too cartoony. And the one big problem was the crashes in Win 95. While the upgrade to version 1.2 reportedly clears up some problems, it seems to have introduced some new ones, especially during combat. The game locked up when my scout retreated from tactical combat with the Guardian at Orion; when I sought to bombard a planet in another game; and twice when my home planet came under attack in a third.

Enough! Eventually, I just threw up my hands and played the game under MS-DOS, where MOO II performs much more consistently.

Me, too: I'm still losing...and I'm still coming back for more.

MASTER OF ORION II

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

In short: Civilization in space.

PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-695-4263 www.microprose.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486DX4/100, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$55–$65

TIPS

▼ Plan your research in advance, and don't waste time and money on areas that ultimately won't see much use. Think guns and butter. ▼ Keep an orbital garrison at every possible planet—certainly those within easy reach of your neighbors. ▼ Don't be afraid to say "no" if you see your trading partners getting the better of you in technology swaps; let them do some of the work. ▼ A well-armed battleship should be enough to take down the Space Eel.

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Rocket Jockey

Blast off!

Rocket Ball's like soccer, only better. Just remember not to hit the referee, or he'll literally kick you to death.

Simply put, Rocket Jockey is one of the coolest alternate-universe, gleefully violent "sports" games ever made.

Imagine strapping yourself atop a land-based jet-ski with rocket turbines for an engine and grappling cables that shoot out and latch onto anything they come into contact with. You can use 'em to make tight turns, create tripwires to hang up other riders, or grab another rider around the neck, drag him around the arena, and slam him into a nearby wall. *Cool.*

Rocket Jockeys compete in three different competitions: Rocket Wars (last guy standing wins), Rocket Ball (snag a ball into the goal for points), and Rocket Race (an obstacle-filled race). Each event contains minimum requirements for victory. In Rocket Ball, you need to score a certain amount of points, so even if you outscore the other competitors, you'll still lose if you don't make the minimum. To take a Rocket Race, on the other hand, you've got to beat the other jockeys *and* the clock. Knocking all the opposition out of the arena is the simple, and entertaining, criteria for winning Rocket Wars.

This variety gives a spice and diversity lacking in games like HyperBlade. It'll take you a while to master the rocket sled—it handles much like a boat—but once you do, you'll love the way it flies.

More disappointing, however, is the omission of the promised multiplayer mode and 3D video-card support. Hopefully, patches will be available in some form by the time you read this, but at press time, neither update was in sight. In hi-res graphics mode, the game still runs well on a P133, supported by a funky, surf-style soundtrack.

On the whole, despite its flaws, Rocket Jockey is highly recommended for those in search of off-beat, goofy, rather sadistic fast-paced fun.

—Jason D'Aprile

ROCKET JOCKEY

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A wild ride of a game, bordering dangerously on innovative.

DEVELOPER:	Rocket Science Games
PUBLISHER:	SegaSoft 888-734-2763 www.segasoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit sound
RECOMMENDED:	P133, gamepad
STREET PRICE:	$46

Advertisement

Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

What you get to do: Shoot with gun, shoot with D-pad, shoot with D-pad and partner, shoot with gun and partner,

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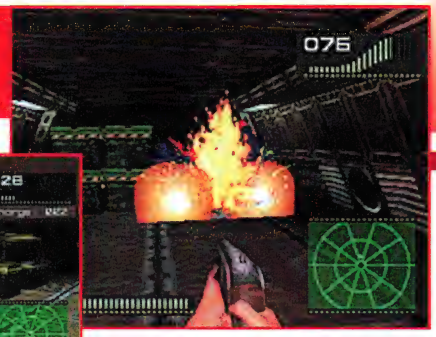
Alien Trilogy

Ripley deserves better



Box explosions symbolize a total lack of atmosphere.

Totally underwhelming enemies don't help.

OK, I confess: I'm stumped here. I always look for redeeming qualities in the games I review. Usually, I'm able to find something positive to say.

Then I came across Alien Trilogy, and I'm stumped. This Doom variant from Acclaim—a conversion from the 32-bit consoles—has virtually nothing to recommend it.

You start this first-person shoot-'em-up guiding Lt. Ripley through the Aliens-infested colony while performing the usual scavenger hunt for ammo and arms. You can save only after completing a level, so caution is the word.

That merely prolongs the pain. The graphics are unexceptional, the 2.5D game engine is pedestrian, the 23 levels are small and simple, the gameplay unexciting, and the effects mostly primitive. Worse still, the weapons, enemies, and deaths are mundane.

The mission structure, with its silly objectives and rationalizations, robs the game of its continuity. The whole point of resource management is rendered only semi-relevant by time-limited bonus levels and by allowing the player an infinite supply of 9mm ammo. The multiplayer mode (IPX network only) requires that each of a maximum of four players has a game CD and neglects cooperative play—an amazing omission to anyone who's seen *Aliens*. The loads are long even on a 6X CD-ROM drive, and the payoff mediocre.

They even manage to screw up the concept, which should have been a no-brainer. Ostensibly, the game is based on the three *Alien* movies, but the designers dispense entirely with the first one, electing instead to wrap the game up by having Ripley return to the alien ship where the saga began. Evidently, they forgot that she died at the end of the third movie, Trilogy's second episode.

That makes her luckier than anyone who buys this game. *—Peter Olafson*

ALIEN TRILOGY

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	D
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	D-
MULTIPLAYER:	D

Avoid.

DEVELOPER:	Probe Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Acclaim Entertainment 516-656-5000 www.acclaimnation.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 1MB SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 6X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

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shoot with D-pad and gun, shoot with gun in each hand. What you don't get to do: Recite poetry, pick daisies, hug lovable stuffed animals.

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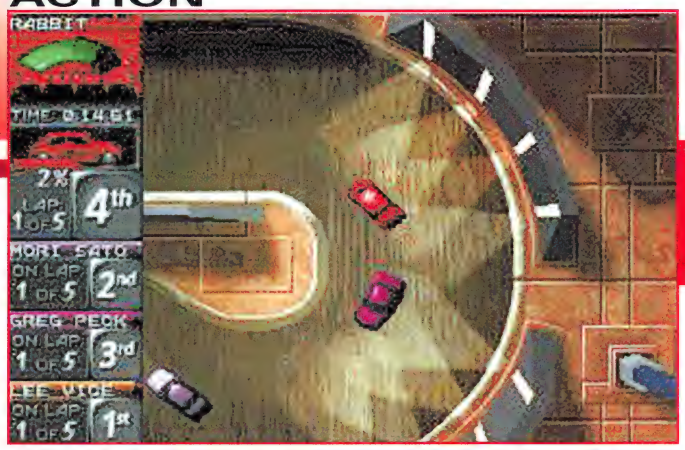
Death Rally

Floor it!



What are you waiting for? Lay some mines and fire those guns!

I don't know about you, but after a few rounds of Quake, Tomb Raider, and other groundbreaking games, I get the urge for some basic, no-frills action—something that reminds me of old-style arcade hits. The next time I'm feeling "old school," I'll be reaching for Death Rally.

I mean, who needs a revolutionary game engine when a game is this addicting? Death Rally offers the simple thrills of topdown racing, much like the classic coin-op Off Road. Like that game, your goal is to be the first to the finish line. Each race is a four-man rally through deserts, forests, and other locales. Come in first, second, or third, and you win some cash—and the chance to upgrade to one of five cooler cars.

Or you can use your money to purchase a better engine, better tires, armor, and other accessories. But screw the pacifism: This is a Death Rally, after all, so you're given the option to race with weapons—which is where the game really shines. There's no greater thrill than using machine guns, mines, and spiked fenders to turn your computer-controlled opponents into a flaming, broken-down heap. Cutting corner after corner to get ahead in each of the 19 tracks, you'll find plenty of ways to spell carnage.

For some real fun, try racing up to three other players over a network, or going head-to-head with a single buddy via modem. Death Rally's computer drivers are tough, even on the easiest of three difficulty levels, but multiplay's where things really heat up.

As a critic, it's my duty to point out some of the things that keep this game from A-List status: average graphics, tracks that tend to jerk rather than scroll smoothy as you drive along. But as a gamer, I feel it in my soul: it'll be a while before I can shake this fever. —*Corey Cohen*

DEATH RALLY

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

B+ OVERALL

Pure mindless fun.

DEVELOPER:	Remedy Entertainment/ Apogee Software
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847 www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, VGA, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$30

FX Fighter Turbo

Some games just don't cut it. FX Fighter Turbo, the sequel to FX Fighter, is another attempt by GTE Interactive to bring console and arcade gamers to the PC. Sadly, with these offerings, gamers wanting good fighting action have to look elsewhere.

Having been (and still am) an avid arcade fighting gamer, I've come to expect certain things from the genre, but Turbo really falls short. The most important virtue a beat-'em-up can have is great play control. This game doesn't—even with great controllers like the GrIP and the SideWinder, which should be perfect for this type of game. The play control is so bad that it really detracts from the well-drawn graphics of the BRender engine. It's just too frustrating when you want to kick but you don't, or can't jump to avoid that sweep when you're about to die.

Turbo speed, same slow gameplay

If you don't have the moves, it doesn't matter how good you look during the fight. When you're dead, you're dead.

—*Christopher Tou*

PUBLISHER:	GTE Interactive 800-483-8632 www.im.gte.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE:	$30–$40

C- OVERALL

Powerslave

Powerslave offers some intriguing twists, but seems more like a clone of the original Doom than a competitor to the current crop of first-person shooters.

You're a covert operations specialist sent in to save the ancient Egyptian city of Karnak from alien tyranny. You'll explore this city through 30 levels, culminating in the Tomb of the Pharaoh Ramses. A nifty third-person view option is available to help you navigate tricky jumps if needed. Weapons are mostly of the ho-hum variety: machete, pistol, machine gun, flamethrower, and hand grenades. A magical Cobra staff and Eye of Rah are nice additions, however, allowing you to cast some pretty powerful spells.

Nothing new here

Powerslave supports eight-player network games, but recommends you play with no more than four people. And there's no modem option. What gives?

With Duke and Quake around, and other cool first-person shooters on the way, there's just no compelling reason to play this one. Save your money.

—*Steve Klett*

PUBLISHER:	Playmates Interactive Entertainment 714-428-2112 www.playmatestoys.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
STREET PRICE:	$50

D+ OVERALL

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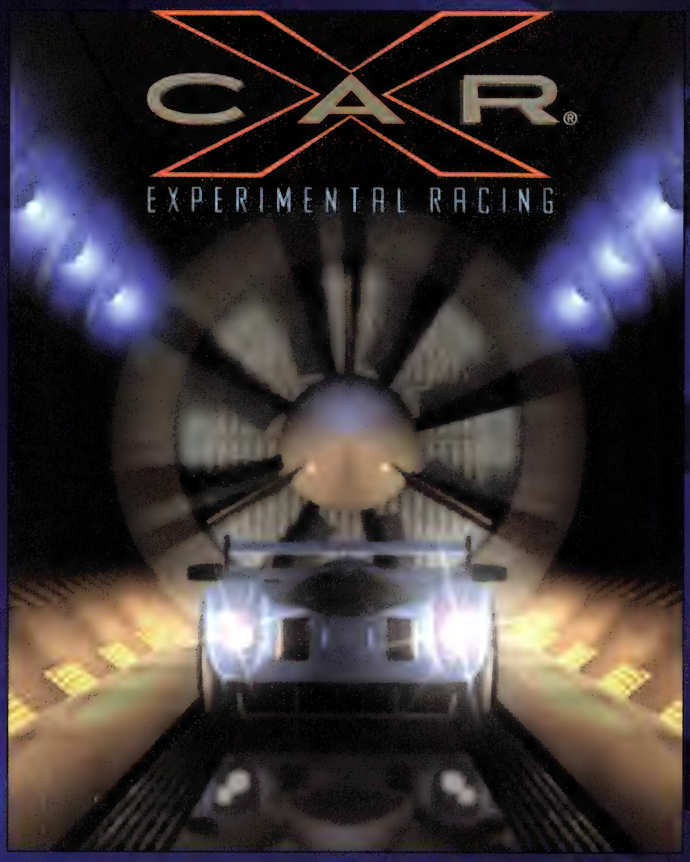

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Actual IBM screens shown

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
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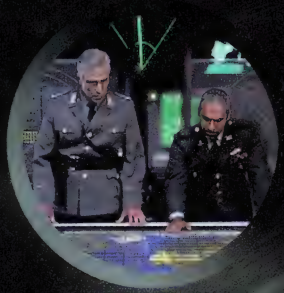

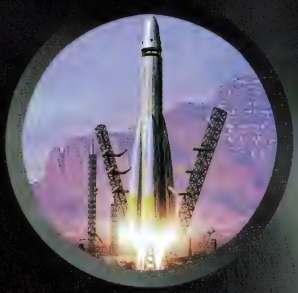

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Star Trek: Borg

The line must be drawn here.

ADVENTURE

By Donald St. John

The world according to Borg.

Resistance is futile. Star Trek: Borg isn't.

For serious gamers, that may be a problem. Borg falls in the tradition of a long line of full-motion-video (FMV) games that seem inevitably crippled by being too short, too easy, and severely lacking in the gameplay department. In this case, that reputation is a shame, because producer Simon & Schuster has cobbled together a neat little adventure with reasonable play choices, good acting, and a seamless tie to the greater *Trek* universe. The production values equal a standard *ST: TNG* episode; they spent time and money on this, and it shows.

You may have to put dear old Dad out of his assimilated misery.

Really, the key warning can be found right on the box, where Borg is billed not as a game, but as "The Ultimate Interactive Movie." If that suggests that the primary audience is hard-core, gobble-up-any-product Trekkers, that's OK, because they ought to gobble this instantly. Star Trek: Borg is a wonderfully filmed piece of interactive technology: It performs well (given a standard gamer-level machine), it gives you an authentic feel for being on a starship in the thick of action, and it reveals new things about *Trek*'s most notorious villains. You even get to be a Borg and see how they perceive their surroundings and communicate with each other.

In making the experience friendly for Trekkers, however, Borg shorts the serious gamer. Play is simple: Choose one of several standard FMV choices. Screw up and you receive a lecture and a pointer toward the right choice. Master the tricorder to get information before making a choice; this also yields some unsubtle hints. None of it is hard; if you wanted to break someone into the world of computer gaming, this wouldn't be a bad choice.

The plot is also simplicity itself. You're Qaylan Furlong, a Starfleet Academy cadet whose father (and all his USS *Righteous* crewmates) bought the farm 10 years ago in the battle of Wolf 359, courtesy of the Borg. Now the relentless cybernetic baddies are headed toward your ship and you've been ordered out of the way. Suddenly, the mischievous, all-powerful Q shows up and offers you the chance to flash back and try to save the *Righteous*—and your old man.

That puts you aboard the *Righteous*, with Q to guide you. Therein lies the best reason to play Borg: In his 12th portrayal of Q, John de Lancie could have sleepwalked through this game, but instead mixes constant smartass humor with real menace. Q is here to kibitz, lecture you when you've screwed up, and generally assist you. He's not exactly a genial tour guide: When you hit Disc 3 of the three-CD set and enter the Borg cube, he's one of them—and he could be as dangerous as any Borg.

Sometimes, you'd really just like to let him have it.

PC Games didn't find an FMV acting performance worthy of its Murphy Award in 1996, but de Lancie ensures that there'll be at least one contender this year.

The rest of the actors essay their roles well, the flow is crisp, and the storyline is engaging. But you'll be through it too quickly—possibly as soon as two to three hours. Oddly enough, replay value will be high for serious Trekkers: Once you've mastered the play choices, there really is an interactive movie to zip through, just like you'd fast-forward the commercials on this week's tape of *DS9*.

Serious gamers, though, will recognize Borg as an unintentional statement about FMV gaming. The production team tried to build some length and difficult play into this title, and they still didn't quite get there. That suggests that we'll have to wait until DVD-ROM to get a serious, long video-based game that doesn't require endless disc-changing. But if you just can't wait, or you've always wondered deep down what the Borg collective thinks and does, Star Trek: Borg is an engaging choice.

STAR TREK: BORG

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A

B- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Well-acted, well-produced, but way too short.

DEVELOPER:	Touchscreen/Imergy/Duck Corp.
PUBLISHER:	Simon & Schuster Interactive 800-910-0099 www.ssitrek.com/trek
PLATFORM:	Win/DOS/Mac CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, VESA local-bus or PCI video card, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Q's criticism can be withering at times, but listen to it: he never misleads you. ▼ Use the tricorder frequently and at a leisurely pace. Often the answer comes right from its information, but you may have to dig through related topics for it. ▼ Can you believe that your own father would cheat? ▼ Sometimes the best thing to do when you see the decision cube is nothing. But if you're going to do something, do it fast: the Borg move quickly.

CHEATS ▼ Wish you could get around with more than Save and Quit for commands? Typing BORG, OBEY, or HUGH can move you back and forth in the game, and—with HUGH—help in decision-making.

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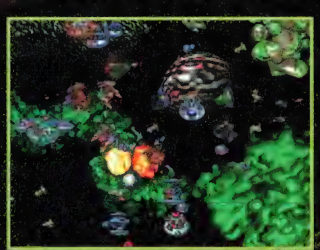

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KIDS TO ADULTS
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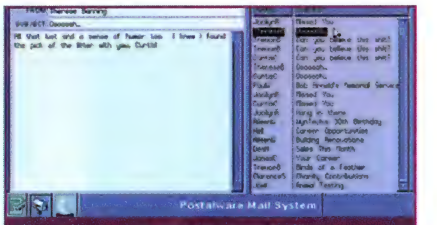
Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh

By Peter Olafson

An FMV horror show



Fun with e-mail.

Want to hear something really scary? Here goes: The follow-up to Sierra's arresting Phantasmagoria is an unexceptional FMV thriller.

Beyond the title, Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh bears no relationship to the 1995 Roberta Williams game. Rather, this five-CD monster uses a system more closely allied with The Beast Within.

Curtis' apartment. Inherited it from grandma, did you, Curtis?

You control Curtis Craig, a technical writer at a pharmaceutical company who's picking up his life again after a spell in a mental hospital. In fact, he seems a good candidate for re-admission. He's beset by horrifying visions, variously dissed by demonic voices and slugged by an invisible force as he sits at his workstation. Is it all in his head?

The nice girl next door.

Apparently not. Co-workers start dying at an alarming rate. The first, whom Curtis is known to dislike, is murdered in Curtis' own cubicle in an especially gruesome fashion.

Messing around with e-mail on the office network (you can send any of three replies) is great fun—the first of several *X-Files*-ish touches to crop up here. The video, in HiColor mode, is of excellent quality. The music is properly eerie and dissonant. And the concept's not bad.

Yet, while I loved Phantasmagoria and wanted to love Flesh, something kept holding me back. What, exactly? Well, take your pick.

It begins with one of the most irrational puzzles I've ever seen. Curtis' wallet is out of reach under the sofa. Does he move the sofa? No. He sends his pet rat to pull it out. Then he uses a granola bar to coax the rat back out.

Then there's the shallow build-up. At times, Curtis seems to lurch from one crisis to another, but always recovers instantly from experiences that would send most of us shrieking back to the bin. Flesh just keeps throwing stuff at us in the hope that something will stick. It's called "pacing," folks.

More emphasis should have been placed on basic storytelling. It's never established why Curtis was in the hospital, or why he should be skulking around the network room, looking in his boss' desk, sneaking into the office after the police detective has shooed him away. (They didn't even bother to make sure that each button on the touch-tone phones makes a single and distinctive sound.) At one point, Curtis stops and touches the partition between cubicles and spattered blood suddenly appears on his hand. But why'd he touch the partition to begin with? We don't have a clue. It seems that transitional scenes have been excised for space.

Then again, some scenes we could have done without. I'm hardly a prude (I liked Harvester), but I found the sex scenes—at least one of which is distinctly R-rated—gratuitous. (Like its predecessor, Flesh can be password-protected.) The occasional mingling of humor with horror, while perhaps unintentional, doesn't work very well.

Not to mention the technical problems. Discs Two and Three were home to consistent lockups, reports of internal errors, and spontaneous reboots on my 32MB P200. Huh?

Finally, the game's reliance upon pure FMV sequences, which can be replayed at will, means the level and quality of interactivity drop another notch. Basically, there's a library of things you can interact with and a huge world of things you can't—the curse of a video-based game. As a result, the game feels more in competition with movies than with other games.

In that realm, I'm afraid, A Puzzle of Flesh just can't compete.

PHANTASMAGORIA: A PUZZLE OF FLESH

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Horror game, gorefest, shocker, comedy—Flesh never makes up its mind.

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707 www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX4/100, 12MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$60

TIPS ▼ To get behind the access panel in the network room, you'll need the key from your boss' desk. Distract him with a phone call from the desk of your supervisor, and he'll clear out just long enough for you to make your move. ▼ While in your boss' office, you'll also find the password for archive files. (It's a little obscure.) ▼ The toolbox needs to be opened. Take it into your living room and click it on Curtis' face.

SubSpace

By Donald St. John

Space, the Final Frontier...unless you're real good.

PC GAMES A LIST

Asteroids sure has grown up, hasn't it? If you're one of the hordes playing SubSpace online, you know the answer to that is *yes*. This Windows 95 cross between Asteroids and Space War is addiction to the 10th power...just like its predecessors. Burst, the Virgin Interactive affiliate that popped Toonstruck onto the market a couple of months back, proves with SubSpace that it's got three qualities likely to propel it to the forefront of game development—good ideas, the taste to know what a game needs and (more importantly) what it doesn't, and the ability to not take itself too seriously.

Asteroids for the online generation

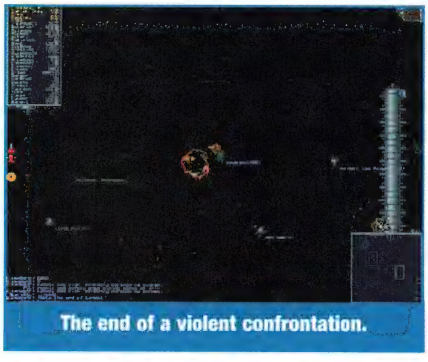
Not that there aren't people taking SubSpace seriously: drop in at almost any hour of the day and there are likely to be dozens of people winging around and blasting away. One reason may be that it's an easy game to get and start up. At the most basic level, you're buzzing around in a little spacecraft controlling your thruster's movement with the up/down arrow keys, rotating with the side arrow keys, and firing with the control button. You can get a lot deeper than that—and to play well, you'll need to—but that's all you need to dive in and start firing. At that level of ease, who *wouldn't* want to play?

Kablam! Bombed again.

Although the association with Asteroids is inescapable, SubSpace has its differences (and 15 years down the road, it'd better). For one thing, it's colorful. For another, it looks considerably better, with the illusion of a 3D space environment and objects on your screen, even though motion is strictly 2D. And the gameplay is divided up into maze-like zones that require you to settle your flying skills to gain true command of your ship, lest you go bouncing wildly off zone walls, asteroids or other ships.

There's one more significant difference: It's strictly online and—for the moment, anyway—free as an ongoing beta test to let Burst refine its online game technology. You download a 2MB zipped file from **www.vie.com/subspace** (or get it from this month's PC Games.EXE); it's smart to also get a small utility called *subcheck* that'll let you know if your system is properly configured with the Microsoft DirectX drivers needed to play. If not, those are also available at the download site. Once you've checked that, just explode the zip archive and launch SubSpace; you may need your Web browser running in the background, but we experienced no trouble over a modem connection.

When you trigger SubSpace, choose a name and password, then a zone to play in. In any given game there are already hundreds of squads flying around, so you can try to join one or just fly solo in one of four types of ships (the maneuverable Warbird, quick Javelin, stealthy Spider or powerful Leviathan). In any case, you'll have a radar screen showing green, yellow, purple, and red dots. Purple ones are your enemies: shoot 'em. Yellow are your buddies. Green indicates powerups that float around the world, conveying everything from such weapons as bombs and Thor's Hammer to increased thruster power, shields, warp capability, and others. And red are the flags you're trying to capture—that's your goal in SubSpace.



The end of a violent confrontation.

When you've gained basic command of SubSpace, you'll start using these options more, thus racking up more points. The server tracks your progress via your name, and the SubSpace site has a regular update of the universe's champions. We'll just warn you once: it wouldn't be hard to sit there all day, chasing the elusive throne of the point leaders, chatting with other pilots via the built-in chat function, blasting away, and generally having a good time. Addiction can be that way, you know.

SUBSPACE

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A

A- OVERALL

Simple to start, easy to play, hard to play well, and thoroughly engrossing.

DEVELOPER:	Burst
PUBLISHER:	Virgin Interactive Entertainment 800-874-4607 www.vie.com/subspace
PLATFORM:	Win 95
REQUIRES:	486/66, DirectX, Win 95–based Internet connection (dial-up or direct)
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium
STREET PRICE:	Free

TIPS ▼ Avoid narrow-walled spaces unless you've got a slew of weapons; otherwise, they're death traps. ▼ Stealth is your friend. If you have it available, trigger it immediately unless your energy levels are low. ▼ You don't always want to avoid the walls. If someone's on your butt, a quick bounce can help shake them. ▼ Strafing is OK as a defensive maneuver, but you need bombs at a minimum to win face-offs.

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Stars!

In space, no one can see your spreadsheet!

By Daniel Morris

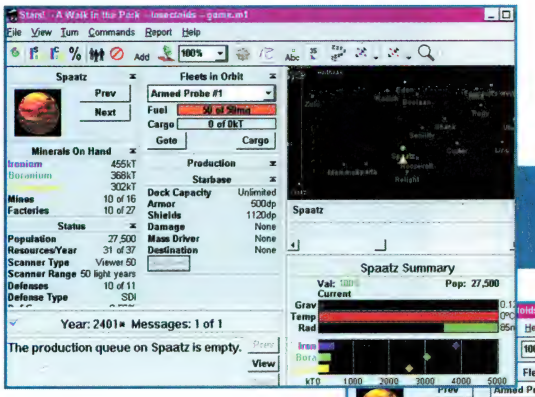
For roughly 18 months, a whole bunch of people have been dominating space, fighting wars, trading, researching, and living in Stars!'s online gaming world. Now Stars! has been updated, boxed, and re-presented for a more widespread commercial pull. This history provides a ready and waiting online following—a remarkable feat considering the incredibly detailed nature of a game with a 200-page manual.

After the small initial installation, players can begin a solo game, or preferably, join games at various online Stars! sites (**www.webmap.com/stars!** is a good place to start) and choose a species. You begin with a home planet and a minimal collection of low-tech starships. Your task, as could be expected, is to develop your technologies and weapons to expand to neighboring worlds, colonize them, and erect a powerful empire.

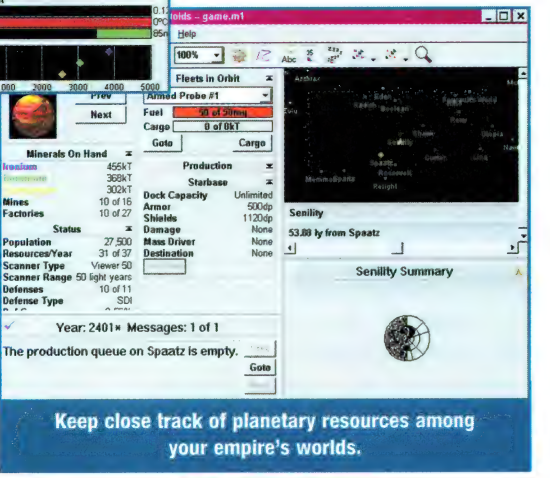
As you can see by the accompanying images, your galactic triumph is depicted through very gray, very dense Windows charts. Welcome to the seat of interplanetary power—it looks and feels a lot like an office cubicle.

Graphics are almost nonexistent. The game is played via a complex web of menus and charts, and Stars! isn't so much played as it is managed—a scrollbar tweak here, a toggle there, maybe a quick dialogue-box edit.

The whole thing is intentionally cheesy. Thousands of planets needed naming, hence monikers such as Goober, Burrito, Slinky, and Maple Syrup. Weapons include the Big Mutha Cannon, Jihad Missile, and Flux Capacitor (Hello? McFly?). So be warned in advance: if you're looking for a stoic, austere empire-building game, you came to the wrong place.



True, there's not much to look at. But at least you won't need a panic button.



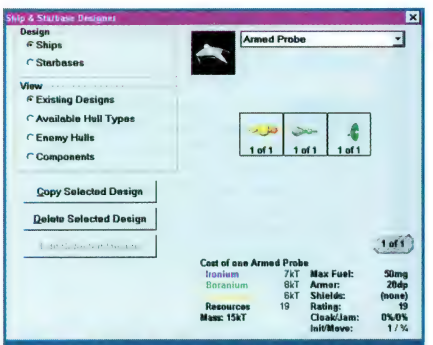
Keep close track of planetary resources among your empire's worlds.

Stars! may be cutesy, but there's nothing juvenile about its gameplay. I'm a veteran of such exceedingly chart-driven games as Harpoon and Capitalism, and it still took me weeks to get on top of everything. Luckily, Stars! is made accessible via a wonderfully instructive tutorial that walks you, screen by screen and move by move, through an introductory game. I'd still encourage you to take notes, though.

Stars! is equal parts decision-making, resource management, and macroeconomics homework. Talk about number-crunching: Every darn thing in the known sector of your galaxy has a chart somewhere to be navigated before success is enjoyed. Track varying amounts of ironium, boranium, and germanium being processed on planets, how much production you're squeezing out of mines and factories—and you'd better get used to knowing and using such chipper units of measurement as kT, l.y., mg, dp, and %, because that's the language of Stars!

If it was meant to compete with Master of Orion II, it's in for a spanking. While Stars! is deep and rich, its appeal bogs down. It becomes work, and the intense attention required to manage each of the crowded info charts gets old. In fact, it's quite common to experience player dropouts or long periods of inactivity in online Stars! games, all because people got stone bored and took off. Usually, they leave a half-built empire behind for the remaining players to carve up.

However, it's nice to see a game in which player creativity is encouraged, as it is here. Everything is manipulable and re-creatable. Customize your own race and its characteristics, then design your own warfleets with weapons, armor, sensors, and drives.



Ship design allows you to assemble a craft complete with weapons, armor, sensors, and drives.

Stars! is interesting enough to hold your attention for awhile, but MOO II keeps calling from its spot on the bookshelf. Empire's effort gets my kudos for a lot of things: it's deep, it's rich, it's detailed, it's creative. If only it were more fun.

STARS!

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	D+
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Rich and detailed, though ultimately it packs little punch.

PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
800-216-9706
www.empire.co.uk
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 386/66, 4MB RAM, sound card
RECOMMENDED: Modem for online play
STREET PRICE: $40

TIPS ▼ Load the maximum number of colonists on each new colony ship before you send it to a new planet. ▼ Your "Teamster" transports can shuttle ore back and forth between planets to help maintain stock on a more barren world. ▼ Number each newly built ship to better keep track of the individuals within a model type.

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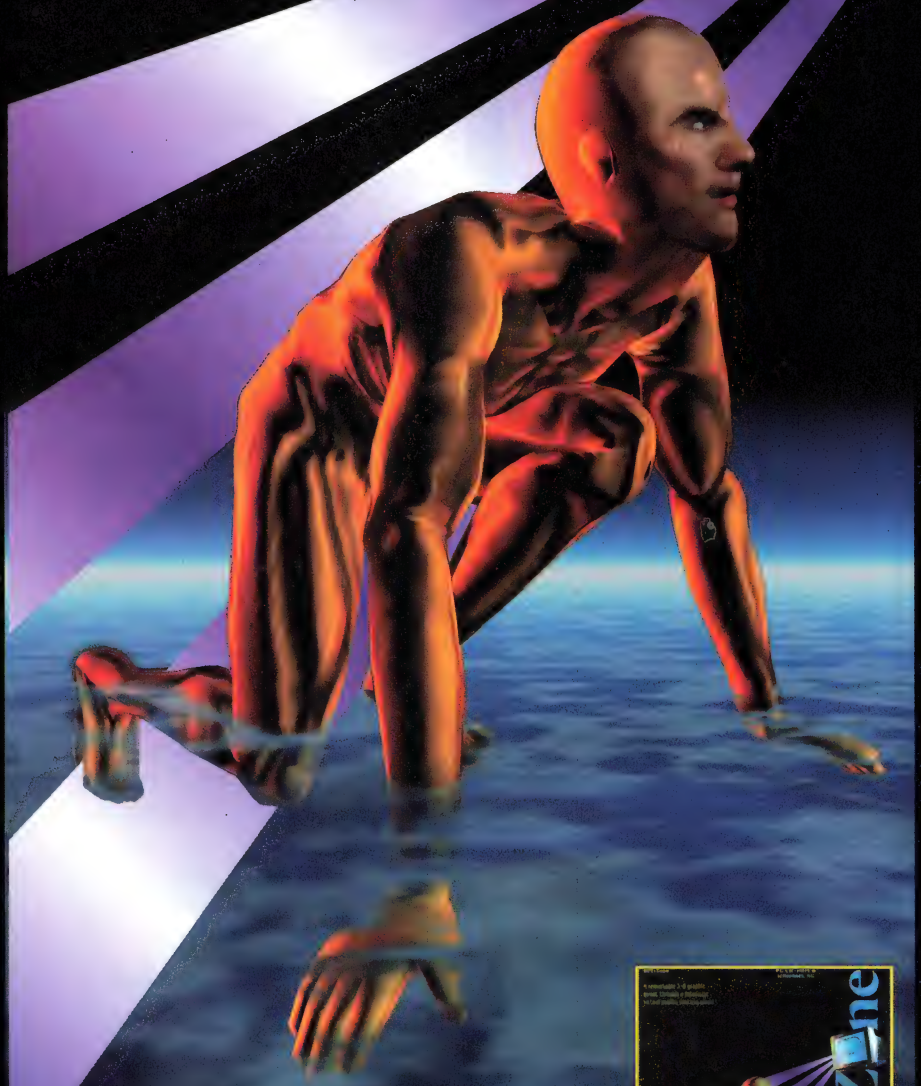
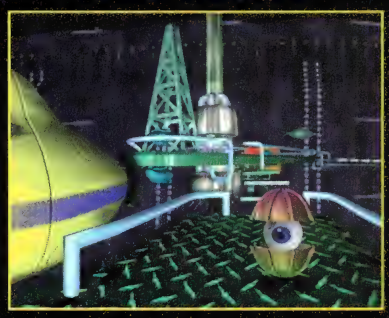
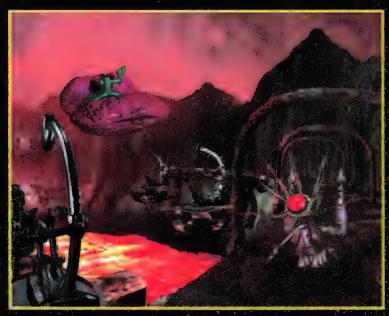


A CyberJunkie's Ultimate Fantasy Come True....





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KIDS TO ADULTS™

K-A

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

More than window dressing: These are all working gauges that you'll need to master.

A-10 Cuba!

That's one big cigar!

When I sat down to review A-10 Cuba!, I thought, "A Mac flight sim turned PC? Good luck!" PC pilots are a tough crowd, especially when a game claims it's "the most realistic flight combat simulator ever." Who'd expect that from a Mac sim? With the exception of F/A-18 Hornet, most of them are pretty much arcade games—a novelty for flight-sim experts.

A-10 Cuba!'s an exception, in part because of its graphics. In short, they're damn good, and their clarity and detail don't sacrifice the high frame rate needed for realistic gameplay.

There's more here than graphics, however. This plane's flight is based on one of the most convincing physics models around. Drag, wind weight, and the fact that it's a slow air-to-mud aircraft with analog gauges and dials make flying a challenge. Another problem: There's no paper manual, so you're forced to keep quitting out and looking up how-to info in the electronic one. The Mac version came with excellent paper documentation—shame on you, Activision!

For me, the eight-player network and head-to-head modem play make up for this shortcoming. Flying your big, slow, but highly maneuverable A-10 Warthog, you'll nail your buddies with an enormous gun—a GAU 8/A 30mm cannon spitting out depleted Uranium bullets at 3,450 feet per second, 4,200 rounds per minute. Jeezus!

Vicious firepower aside, the game's missions—and there are only 12 of them—lack a certain punch in single play. They're extremely challenging and full of ultra-realistic AI, but in terms of longevity, they stall out fairly quickly. Cuba!'s predecessor, A-10 Attack!, had a virtual battlefield where one could control all allied aircraft and make up missions; this sim is strictly "jump in and fly."

Still, if you're a flight sim buff looking for an excellent simulation of this particular aircraft, A-10 Cuba! may be a nice addition to your hangar.

—Anthony Lukban

A-10 CUBA!

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

B- OVERALL

Superb graphics, authentic flight model, lackluster missions.

DEVELOPER:	Parsoft
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650 www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 1MB VESA local bus or PCI video with 1MB RAM
RECOMMENDED:	Joystick or flight yoke
STREET PRICE:	$34.95

You can fly through cities you created.

SimCopter

Explore your Sim cities

SimCopter is simply a revelation. With its newest title, Maxis has begun to realize the potential of its technology. This Win 95 sim isn't another outside-looking-in building simulation; instead, it uses SimCity 2000 itself as a building block.

In a nutshell, you can create a city in SC2000—30 built-in ones are provided on the CD—import it into SimCopter, and then fly through all its glory in third-person 3D. The only amendments are an airport, if you didn't build one, and some empty surrounding terrain.

The result is a startlingly faithful re-creation of your original. It's exactly the way you left it on the drawing board. The artwork has a vaguely English cast, like some of the newer, less-built up sections of London. Roads still follow their angular courses. Bridges span, and rivers and tunnels can be found beneath them. Everything is just waiting to be explored.

In SimCopter cities, chimneys billow smoke and cars ply the roads, sometimes going too fast. Boats sail the waters, and sometimes capsize. People gather, and sometimes riot.

The flight controls are closer to an arcade flying game than a flight sim, but a good eye will help you get through tight spots. While simple exploration is fun, there are also missions. Your radio carries reports of disaster and mayhem, requiring the use of your megaphone, firing tear gas, dumping water, calling the cops, leading them with your searchlight, or transporting injured to the hospital. (They make horrible gurgling sounds en route).

I've occasionally watched my copter fly through certain surfaces, but it wasn't a serious glitch. You can also hit the road, but I wish the figure was a bit more prepossessing—it's ugly as SimCopter is stunning—and given greater liberty. (It can't cross bridges.) Some of these problems are reportedly repaired by a patch available at Maxis' Web site, which also fixes a range of other oddities, like the reluctance of cars to pass through tunnels.

The next step: a driving game, due in spring. Guess I'll need a taxi: I'm almost drunk with expectation.

—Peter Olafson

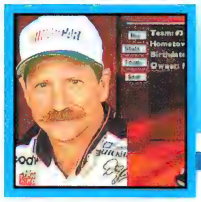
SIMCOPTER

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

B+ OVERALL

Stunning new entry in the Sim series. But what's with the bugs?

PUBLISHER:	Maxis 800-336-2947 www.maxis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 512K SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P100, sound card, DirectX-compatible joystick
STREET PRICE:	$50



NASCAR Racing 2

By Shane Mooney

The game's hi-res graphics bring Phoenix International Raceway to life.

PC GAMES A LIST

Some racing fans prefer their cars to whiz by like buzzing flies as they circle the track in their Indy car. Real men would rather feel their organs rattle in their chest while watching grown boys battle it out in the fastest stock cars on the planet. So it was no wonder that real men ran out in droves, bought the original NASCAR Racing, and elected it Simulation of the Year.

Days Of Thunder, Part 2

To paraphrase the great *Six Million Dollar Man*, "We have the technology to make it better, stronger, faster," which is exactly what Sierra has done with NASCAR Racing 2, a title that's superior to its predecessor in nearly every way—and is possibly one of the year's best sims.

For starters, NASCAR 2 includes all the tracks from the original game plus the add-on track pack, totaling 16 circuits, including the Sears Point Raceway and Watkins Glen International. All tracks feature the same banks, billboards, and bleachers as the real thing. The tracks also have a lot more detail, with sharper-looking grandstands and backgrounds, more ads on the wall, and an infield with people and RVs. Believe it or not, all this extra detail comes without sacrificing frame rate, something unheard of in the original.

Users of Rendition-based 3D accelerator cards are in for a real treat. Even Super VGA graphics can't compare to the clarity provided by this card; objects are even more detailed, and the cars look more solid and realistic.

Naturally, it wouldn't be NASCAR without the drivers, and NASCAR Racing 2 features the actual racers from the real circuit, including the famous Dale Earnhardt, whose No. 3 car was sorely missed in the original.

Like the rest of the game, the cockpit's so real, you'll feel like you're actually blazing through a real course.

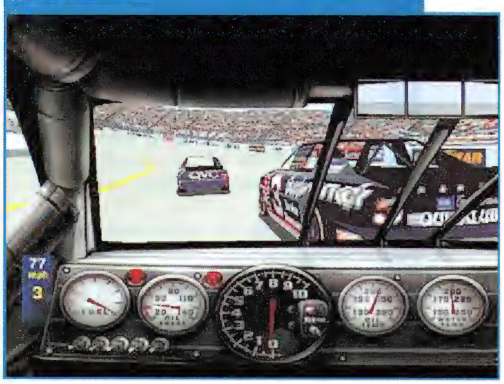
To make sure it's as close to the real thing as possible, you now get advance audio alerts from your crew chief and spotter, who'll tell you about potential hazards and track conditions. Anal-retentive types will love the fact that you can tinker in the new, simplified garage interface to your heart's content. Adjust things like weight distribution, tire pressure, and your suspension. You can also do a custom paint job on your car—the paint shop has more tools and colors and a higher resolution, making it a vast improvement over the original's paint kit.

Better yet, Sierra's made sure there's plenty to love here for arcade-racing types. While the original NASCAR was so real it discouraged all but the most devoted simmers, the NASCAR 2 learning curve can be as steep or shallow as you want. For rookie drivers who prefer to throw realism to the wind, an arcade mode offers supergrip traction and forces the computer opponents to drive at the player's level, as well as offering autobrake and autoshift features.

Head-to-head play via modem and eight-way network play are the icing topping off this king of stock-car sims.

NASCAR 2 ain't perfect, though. For example, track records include the arcade times, which are next to impossible to beat in realistic mode. Configuring some game peripherals, such as the ThrustMaster Grand Prix II, can also be an ordeal. But these are minor annoyances, and should in no way deter NASCAR fans from burnin' some rubber on the way to pick this game up.

Unlike the original, NASCAR Racing 2 gives you the opportunity to scrape paint with Dale Earnhardt.



NASCAR RACING 2

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

Right now, it's the best racing game available on the PC.

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707 www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 16MB RAM, Win 95 or DOS 5.0, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, Rendition-based accelerator card, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS ▼ Read the manual thoroughly. It provides a wealth of information on how to set up your car properly and how to interpret and adjust the data you get during the race and testing. ▼ Learn the paths the computer drivers like to take. This will not only help you avoid running into them, but also allow you to pick up a draft easier. ▼ Don't expect to be able to just run out there and blow everyone off the track. Play around in the garage and build yourself a car that's fast and consistent for long races. ▼ When you set up your car's gearing for ovals, do what the pros do and have two top gears. Fourth gear should be a conservative, fuel-saving ratio, and third should be set a few teeth lower for maximum performance.

Privateer 2: The Darkening

By Peter Olafson

More Wing Commander

Be prepared to defend your goods from roving bandits.

The space sequences in Privateer 2 look as good as any I've seen. The acting and cinematography have more in common with movies than computer games. And the interface is a joy: natural, simple, intelligent.

So why is this man typing instead of blasting away?

It's not that The Darkening isn't a decent game. This British production, the successor to 1993's Privateer, is a challenging, handsome, technically respectable free-form variation on the Wing Commander III and IV concept.

But, at the same time, it lacks the texture that makes "free-form" meaningful. Even if you have control over the configuration of your ship, what it carries and where it flies, a packet of tightly scripted missions is still a packet of tightly scripted missions.

In the story, you're Lev Arris, and you're something of a mystery—not least of which, to yourself. You've been retrieved from an old cryo pod that was stowed aboard a crashed ship, and restored to health.

But your memory seems to have been left behind—oh, no, not the amnesia plot device again!—and that's especially inconvenient, as everyone and his wingman is trying to merge you with a vacuum. Someone up there doesn't like you…whoever you are.

The truth is out there—way out there—and to find it, you'll have to follow leads across the Tri-Systems. And that's going to cost money. You start with only enough for the most basic of ships and weapons, and will have to run missions (found through planetside BBSs and other means) to keep your ship running and your equipment ahead of the curve. Luckily, fuel's free; only your afterburners need to be recharged.

Again, it's essentially Wing Commander freestyle. You're self-employed, and go where you want, when you want, how you want.

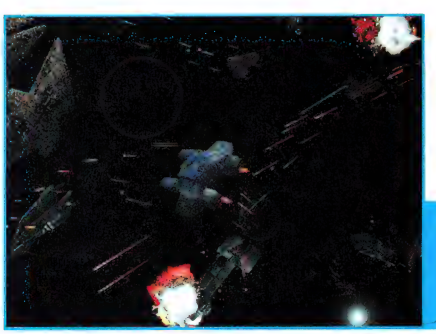
The key scenes in that main plot, as well as a number of the side missions, are played out in full-motion-video sequences. Usually, I can't abide FMV games—they're the '90s version of VCR games—and Privateer 2's three CDs are full of barely interactive WC-vintage FMV scenes. But here, they're not half-bad. As Lev, British actor Clive Owen is effective, reassuring, and sympathetic. John Hurt plays a sleazy bartender with relish, and Jurgen Prochnow (*Das Boot*) puts in a typically understated appearance as a smuggler. Unfortunately, Christopher Walken, who plays a military intelligence officer, seems to have faxed in his performance.

In the flight sequences, Lev moves through space by jumping between navigational points, and each has to be cleared before he can leap to the next. The ship designs are practical rather than fanciful, and they look superb.

Happily, the world is not simply fixed in place and awaiting your arrival to let loose its traps. Visit a nav point once, and you may get blown out of the sky by a whole army of pirates. Restore your game, visit it again, and it may be clear. At the same time, however, Privateer 2 has a consistency: It's nice to find that the ship that jumped in behind you at the last nav point is still with you at the next one.

On the other hand, the game's lustrous components could use some fine-tuning. The enemy AI seems almost nil until you reach novice level, when suddenly, you start getting hammered. Admittedly, this is a shoot-'em-up rather than a sim, but collisions occur frequently with no apparent consequences to your ship. (Indeed, ramming proves a useful strategy.) The explosions are oddly dispassionate, and the death howls of your enemies quickly grow tiring. And it takes too long to fly from your arrival point to within landing distance of a planet.

In short, Privateer 2 is fun, but a familiar sort of Wing Commander 4.5–ish fun. It's a good game, but it falls short of its potential.



Wing IV? Not quite, but there are similarities.

PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Good, solid space sim.

DEVELOPER:	Origin Systems
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525 www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, 1MB SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$60

TIPS ▼ Pick up a Straith, a pair of stream lasers, and a pair of Python missiles at the start. (You can afford a Volt laser, but the streams are a better value.) ▼ Don't take on the pirate shuttles head-to-head: the big topside gun is a killer. Attack their rear and bottom areas, which are unguarded. ▼ If you're down on your uppers, check for the presence of military craft at a nav point before you engage pirates. They may do the job for you.

CHEATS ▼ To use the cheats, enter the Navigation Display while flying your ship. Hit F for Find, then enter these codes: ▼ CHILL OUT: Reduces laser temperature to 0. ▼ NAPALM: Infinite nukes (Alt-S). ▼ NO TALENT: Invincibility. ▼ PETY PETY: Full afterburner fuel. ▼ REP ME UP: Restores ship, armor, and shields to full strength.

Note: Cheats wear off when you reach a station or planet.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Jetfighter III

Not for flight-sim purists

By Dominic Silk

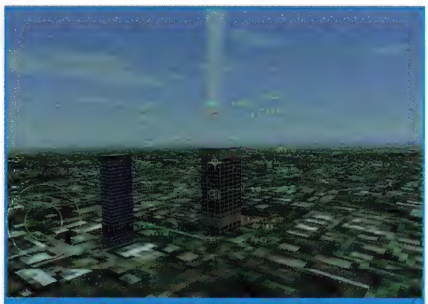
It's been a while since Jetfighter II appeared, making Jetfighter III one of the most anticipated games for flight enthusiasts. It also appears in a crowded market that includes full-blown simulations like Back to Baghdad and flight games like NovaLogic's F-22 Lightning II. JFIII is a flight *game*, not a flight *sim*, but it's not a bad example of its type.

JFIII installs under Windows 95 (DOS mode) or DOS, and it will take only a few minutes before you're ready to fly. There's no sound when you run the game under Win 95, but Mission Studios has promised to fix this problem with a patch (which wasn't available at press time).

The game places you aboard the UNS *Peacekeeper*, a *Nimitz*-class nuclear aircraft carrier that is part of a United Nations rapid-deployment force. The *Peacekeeper* will take you to various hot-spots around the world where you will fly the F-22 or F/A-18.

An innovative game interface allows you to walk around the carrier into various rooms in which you access the missions and other features of the game. In the library, a multimedia encyclopedia provides information on various aircraft and weapon systems, and a newspaper gives updates on "current" world events during a campaign. Combine these elements with an in-game e-mail system, and you get a reasonable atmospheric link to the simulated world. If you get bored walking around, you can "jump" directly to any part of the ship using an onscreen menu.

There are 13 training missions complete with help for each phase. Campaign missions are introduced with clear maps and flight plans that explain your objectives. Before you begin a mission, you have the opportunity to select a weapon load-out from the preset packages available. You can even create your own nose-art using a paint program accessed from the hangar deck.



Great detail in the cities makes flying through the built-up areas fun on its own.

JFIII supports a number of screen resolutions from 320-by-200 to 640-by-480, and lets you control clouds and visibility conditions. With all these options, you should be able to get it to run on some fairly old PCs, though even a P200 will struggle with the frame rate if all the settings are maxed-out. However, the hi-res graphics are excellent.

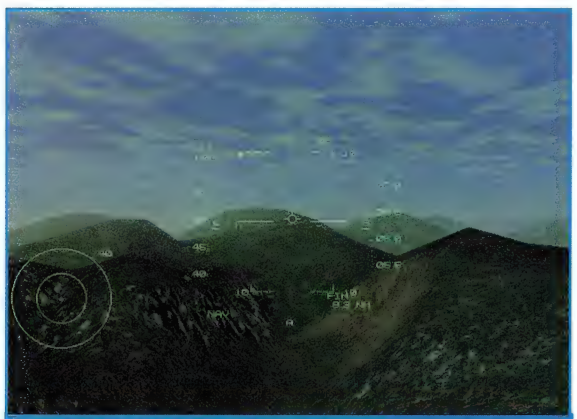
The penalty for the effort invested in the "real-world" graphics is that the program frequently pauses for a couple of seconds while it loads the next area from the CD. If you have few hundred megabytes of spare disk space, copy all the files to your hard drive.

The weapon systems and avionics are simplified, and the implementation of the Maverick targeting system requires you to shoot only at pre-determined targets, or to point your nose at the ground below your desired target rather than the target itself.

The flight model is quite good for a game of this type, and the bump and bounce as you release the heavier weapons is excellent. The areas of conflict—South America, Antarctica, and Cuba—provide a varied background to the mission-linked storyline, and if you're looking for a flight game with a large area to explore, JFIII is certainly a good choice. On the other hand, if you prefer to just get in the air and fight, the better features of F-22 make it a more sensible choice.

You can pan the camera in Jetfighter's external views.

Dominic Silk is the editor of Enemy Lock On, *a military flight-sim magazine.*



In high detail, the valleys and gorges are perfectly re-created from national mapping agencies' data.

JETFIGHTER III

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	D
OVERALL	C

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Looks good with a large area of terrain, but Lightning II plays better.

DEVELOPER:	Mission Studios
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-969-4263 www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX4/100, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

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- Computer Gaming World

CG CHOICE

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- Computer Shopper

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS PC GAMES 1997

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The improved tracks are the best part of Destruction Derby 2.

Destruction Derby 2

Bam! Wack! Crunch! Ouch!

The original Destruction Derby was the first driving game to knock me off my chair. You had to love smashing it up in the bowl of death; there's nothing like a decent racing engine mixed with the action of a Doom deathmatch. I couldn't wait to play the sequel—promises of tightly improved suspension, larger and wider tracks, and four new outdoor arenas had me craving the mayhem. Would my dreams come true with Destruction Derby 2?

Loading DD2 was a breeze: it installs to Windows 95 almost effortlessly, although it needs at least a Pentium 100. (On a P90, it slowed to a crawl.) I fired up a time-trial race for starters, saving the best—the deathbowls—for last. Right out of the starting block, I was impressed. The improved suspension was much appreciated—those sharp turns hug better as a result. The car dynamics were also much better, with the front end dipping into tight corners, and the feel of the tracks made the racing mode as fun as the old destruction mode.

That was still before the good part—the Destruction Derby itself. I couldn't wait to get back in the ring, rubbing fenders with the computer drivers. But my excitement didn't last long, not even a minute. I rammed head-first into another car and went flying 30 feet into the air! My jaw dropped. I was in love with the newfound realism, only to be horrified by the lack of gravity in the 3D engine. Cars were flying past me like the cow in *Twister*. I was speechless.

Were it not for that problem, the game would be great fun. The graphics engine is smooth if you have the processing muscle, albeit with some occasional clipping problems (a whole car dropped out on me at one point—not cool). And the wider tracks and improved handling will keep arcade lovers coming back for seconds. If you love unreal racing action, then Destruction Derby 2 is for you. I just wish the 3D engine was a little more consistent. And where's the multiplay? —*Nash Werner*

DESTRUCTION DERBY 2

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Some unintentional bumps, but it's still slam-bang excitement.

DEVELOPER:	Reflections
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794 www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 8MB RAM (16MB for Win 95), DOS 6.0 or Win 95, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$54.95

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Tom Clancy SSN

Running silent, running deep in the South China Sea.

Battle stations!

Submarine warfare is dirty, stealthy work, perfectly suited for snipers—requiring long hours tracking targets without being detected. In Tom Clancy SSN, Simon & Schuster and Virtus drew inspiration from MechWarrior 2 and came up with a similar interface that adapts well to 20th-century undersea combat.

As anyone who has read *Debt of Honor* and *Executive Orders* knows, Clancy sees China as a growing threat to international stability. In Tom Clancy SSN, new Chinese leadership occupies a group of islands in the South China Sea, located on a mammoth new oil preserve.

The United States responds with a massive naval build-up, including aircraft carrier groups and its latest Los Angeles–class attack submarines. Players have to get their sub from U.S. waters to the impending war zone, sinking stray Chinese submarines along the way. Once on station, the task is to support the carrier groups and eliminate Chinese targets of opportunity.

The developers have made driving this sub pretty easy, being based on the familiar MechWarrior 2 model. Since we're talking submarines, there's no cockpit view, but the main screen is in chase-view with 360-degree external views available. Sonar reports and target tracking appear on a separate tactical display to the lower left. Direction and depth angle appear at the top of the screen, and other options can be toggled from a third display on the lower right. Maneuvering is easy using arrow keys and a selection of other keys for ballast trimming, speed, etc.

Missions are preset, with predetermined "way" points that have to be reached after first clearing prior stations of Chinese subs.

For sub fans, Tom Clancy SSN will rock. If you've read Clancy's books, or have a good understanding of how submarine warfare is fought, SSN provides a realistic and engaging environment to stalk adversaries. There's even a second disc with a discussion between Clancy and former submariner Doug Littlejohns.

—*George T. Chronis*

TOM CLANCY SSN

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A sniper's dream come true.

DEVELOPER:	Virtus
PUBLISHER:	Simon & Schuster 800-910-0099 www.clancyssn.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P120, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$69.95

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Phi Slamma Jamma, NBA Live '97–style.

NBA Live '97

EA retains its hoops title

For three years running, EA has dominated the basketball sim market with its NBA Live series. Nothing's changed with the release of NBA Live '97.

It features the same polygonal 3D players you've already seen in EA's NHL '97—and, as in that game, they look fantastic. They're so detailed, in fact, that you can even make out facial hair, eyes, and muscle definition. Motion-captured players move as smoothly as they look: slams, layups, jumpers, and "showtime" moves all look authentic. Players also treat the "rock" with NBA flair, so expect to see plenty of crossover dribbles, alley-oops, tip shots, and behind-the-back passes. The stadiums—all 29 of 'em—look great as well, as do the courts, right down to the rim and net.

New features include 60 authentic offensive and 10 defensive NBA plays to call, either during a timeout or on the fly with preset keys; an NBA PA announcer; and new camera angles and music. You also get all 29 NBA teams with updated 1996–97 rosters, as well as full season and playoff play. Best of all, you can create players, which means you can even put yourself in the game and go toe to toe with the NBA's best. You can trade and draft players, too.

NBA Live '97's gameplay includes some minor tweaks but remains largely unchanged—you'll find yourself grumbling over the same shortcomings of its predecessor, such as the inability to take a baseline jumper without hitting the side of the backboard. But the biggest sin of all is the lack of support for multibutton joysticks. Sure, you can use a Gravis Gamepad or GrIP system, but the game will only recognize two buttons!

That said, Live '97 is still a worthy purchase for rabid B-ball fans. It looks and sounds fantastic, and is still fun to play. Also, the new network and modem support may overcome the game's controller shortcomings for many: Live '97 is a blast head-to-head over a LAN, modem, or serial connection.

—Steve Klett

NBA LIVE '97

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B

B+ OVERALL

A rim-rocking good time.

PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525 www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 8MB RAM (12MB with Win 95), DOS 5.0 or Win 95, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, 4MB video RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

Front Page Sports: Football Pro '97

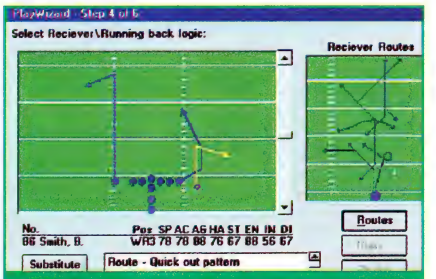
Football is full of dynasties: the 49ers, the Packers, the Cowboys, and the entire Football Pro series. For the last three years, these games have been some of the best around. The '97 version continues the winning ways of its predecessors with a slew of revolutionary changes.

If you're one of those "first on my block" buyers, though, be warned: this game is very buggy right out of the box. If a gameplan is imported from the '96 version, the game will crash after the kick-off. The AI is buggy, too: Each game, I was averaging 4 kicks blocked, at least one kick-off returned for a touchdown, and 2 punts returned for a touchdown. A patch is now available on Sierra's Web site that fixes these problems.

Short by a few inches

All the things familiar to veteran Football Pro players are still here—and much improved. Detailed graphics and animations perfectly re-create dives, flip-over tackles, and hard sticks. Unlike most football games, the players are not too big for the field and the ball not too big for the players.

Camera Angle Management allows every play to be viewed from every possible angle, showing how Instant Review should be done in the real world. Gameplay controls are superb, and the League play, with Season or Career options, is topnotch. The Career play option is still unmatched, with player aging affecting performance and college drafts allowing you to build a dynasty of your own.



The PlayWizard is the next level in play-making ease.

The most obvious of the changes is the fact that this game is now native to Windows 95. For armchair coaches, the play editor is also the best in the business, allowing various plays to be drawn. Football Pro '97 also comes with a PlayWizard, allowing plays to be created on the fly. Twenty minutes was all it took for me to create 64 customized plays for my gameplan.

The biggest and most requested change has finally been added in Football Pro '97: it now has network and modem play! It also comes with a chat mode, allowing players to stick the other player, then get up and rub it in with some old-fashioned trash talk. That makes the game better than ever.

—Christopher Tou

FOOTBALL PRO '97

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	A

B+ OVERALL

Both rookies and veterans will be delighted.

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707 www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive,mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P75, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$55

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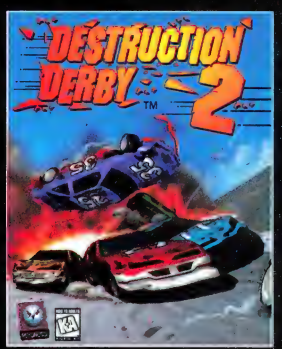
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM



Destruction Derby™ 2 is the perfect combo of balls-to-the-wall racing and 3D wreckage. Seven new tracks are longer, wider, faster, plus four destruction bowls. Cars roll, cars flip, cars fly off the track. There's more deadly debris to deal with - tires, doors, hoods get jettisoned and serve as incoming missiles. There's all new fire, new explosions, and improved suspensions for more realistic handling. Destruction Derby 2. Designed exclusively for the true connoisseur of crash.

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M.A.X.

By Daniel Morris

Ground attack planes strafe land targets—and provide some awesome explosions.

Real-time? Turn-based? How about the best of both worlds?

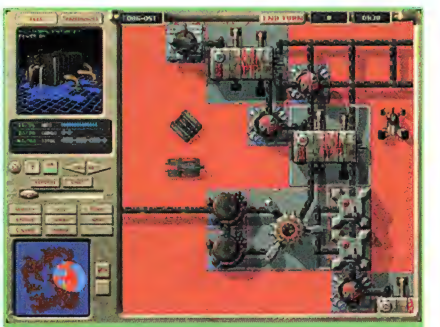
Among the glut of futuristic God-type strategy games that we've been seeing, it's going to be M.A.X. that actually wins that coveted spot on my hard drive. Its designers, Ali Atabek and Paul Kellner, obviously drew up a long list of what works and what doesn't in the current state of real-time and turn-based strategy, and mixed the very best of both into a nicely synergized amalgam with this excellent game.

M.A.X. posits a future in which Earth's societal outcasts, all the extremist cults and downtrodden governments, are taken into space by a council of starfaring alien races with the promise of new homes on new worlds. The catch: Earth's clans have to fight it out for these new colony planets as proxies for their alien overseers.

Best-laid plans of a M.A.X. commander: construct a base and then watch it burn.

The brightest and hardiest of the human clans undergo radical surgery to enhance their higher brain functions and permit them to operate under the stresses of space travel. These Mechanized Assault and Exploration (M.A.X.) commanders pilot the hulking starships that transport their clan to a waiting warworld. Once there, they plant seed colonies and begin to assemble the production facilities and military might that will allow them to prevail against the other human factions.

To claim control of the planet, you have to begin almost from scratch with mining for natural resources, converting them into production power in factories, power plants, and construction facilities,



Building bases requires solid management.

and then begin churning out war machines. War is conducted on land, sea, and air by all manner of vehicles, from scout bikes to tanks, missile carriers, submarines, ground attack planes, and fighters.

The innovative turn sequence deserves attention, as it maintains the in-the-moment frenzy of real-time combat while still allowing time for considerate commanders to effectively marshall their forces. This is all thanks to a "simultaneous turns" structure in which every commander in the game (as many as four can play at once) issues orders within the same time frame. Set a time limit on the turn length to keep decisions coming fast. Once orders are issued, the action plays out in real time, with conflicting forces and changing fortunes on the battlefield forcing rapid rethinking. For turn-based purists, there is a strictly turn-based option as well.

M.A.X. is highly accomplished in just about every area. Its graphics are very attractive Super VGA, without the small, crowded look typical of SVGA strategy games. The maps sport attractive terrain and water features. Each vehicle and structure type is unique and interesting, and the game's cinematics are absolutely breathtaking. Normally, I'm tempted to take shots at the inclusion of extraneous cinematics, but M.A.X.'s animated scenes all forward the story and the sense of place.

There's a lot to learn, but an excellent set of training missions gets you squared away in no time. Thankfully, it's the kind of detail we like—scouring the landscape with surveyor drones to find resource deposits, trolling coastal waters for lurking enemy subs, networking a stronger power line to your structures with the help of an engineer unit—and not the detail we don't like, which would be any of the long list of real-time woes that even avid fans of C&C complain about. There's no blaming computer AI here; you're in charge, and that's the way we like it.

M.A.X. belongs on every space strategy gamer's shelf. While it's not a revolutionary achievement or an instant classic, M.A.X. is as well-executed as any mission-based strategy game out there.

M.A.X.

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

B+ OVERALL

Easy to learn, fun to play—a great blend of calculated resource management and frantic real-time combat.

PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775 www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, Microsoft-compatible mouse
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$49.95

TIPS ▼ Group a missile crawler with small platoons of tanks. The tanks can form a forward shield for the more lightly armored crawlers, which can use the protection while they blast whatever's in front of the tanks with their highly powerful missiles. ▼ Use engineer units to build a web of connectors right from the start. Your constructors can then build new structures already online with the base's improved power supply. ▼ Natural resources are richest near mountains. Snoop around mountains with your surveyors to uncover the best deposits. ▼ Enemy structures are best incorporated, not demolished. Dislodge his defenses and then use supply trucks to transfer minerals or gold from his structures to yours.

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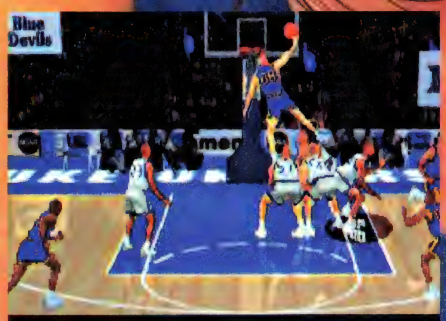

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TO THE DANCE?

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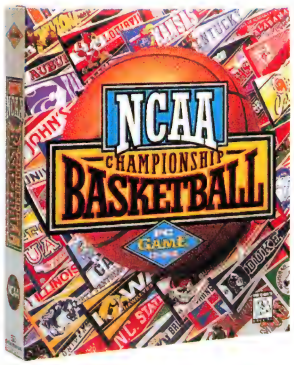

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Age of Sail

Heave to! Enemy to starboard

It's always a little scary when a gamemaker tries something different. TalonSoft, well known for its turn-based Battleground series, thought it'd try its hand at some real-time strategy. Oddly enough, this naval combat simulation is the company's most entertaining product to date.

The major reason is the real-time format. Age of Sail still has the look and feel of the Battleground games. The graphics are crisp and nicely detailed, the soundtrack gives the game that same authentic flavor, and the screen setup, commands, and toolbar are also similar to Battleground's. Unlike those games, however, the action is continuous, making it more realistic and seriously addictive.

There's no shortage of battles, either. You can choose from more than 100 different historical scenarios, ranging from single ship-vs.-ship encounters to squadron actions to commanding a fleet of 20 or more ships in an engagement like the Battle of Trafalgar.

Age of Sail also contains a campaign game, which is a series of computer-generated scenarios based on a common historical theme like the American Revolutionary War. You start out as a lowly lieutenant, gradually advancing in rank and gaining command of more powerful ships. Do well enough, and you'll become admiral of an entire fleet. Just be prepared to spend weeks or even months getting there. If you don't find any of these options seaworthy, the Scenario Editor has more than 2,000 historically accurate ships to select from, and you decide the parameters of the conflict.

Modem-to-modem play is available if you get tired of facing the computer, but the action moves much slower on the screen, even in the game's fastest speed. It's possible to play another person on the same computer, but since you can only give orders with the mouse, and there's only one of those for two players, you've got a problem.

If you like Age of Sail, get ready, because TalonSoft is scheduled to release Age of Ironclads (American Civil War) and Age of Oars (3000 B.C.–1200 A.D.) sometime in 1997.

—Andrew Miller

The high seas are yours in Age of Sail.

AGE OF SAIL

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	**B+**
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

A hearty real-time military sim.

DEVELOPER:	TalonSoft
PUBLISHER:	Empire Interactive 800-211-6504 www.empire.co.uk
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES	486DX/33, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit sound card, mouse
STREET PRICE:	$47

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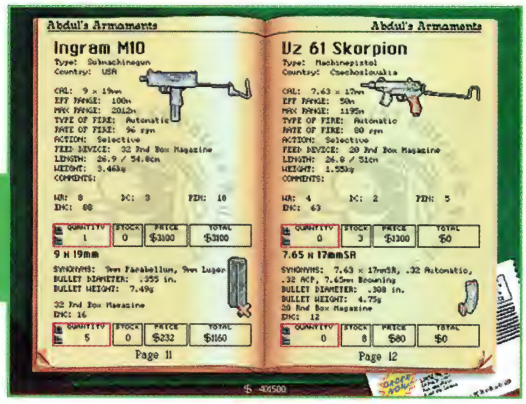
Wages of War

By Daniel Morris



Browse the catalogs of international arms dealers to stock up on weapons for your latest mission.

They've been called Wild Geese, Dogs of War, and Expendables. Their idea of a trade mag is *Soldier of Fortune*. And God only knows what they tell the IRS.

Wages of War, one of New World Computing's first releases under the umbrella of 3DO, hands you the reins of a start-up mercenary outfit, MERCS Inc., armed with one simple mission statement: Turn a profit.

The only ideology we subscribe to is the cold, hard dollar

To earn those ducats, you entertain offers of employment from all manner of shady characters inhabiting the early 21st century's halls of power—government bigwigs, corporate suits, and wealthy individuals with no official recourse. They fax contracts offering missions as varied as sabotage, hostage rescue, industrial theft, and outright assassination.

Negotiate for the best rate, then sit down with your accountant (who's always nervously eyeing the bottom line of the ledger) to set about gathering intelligence, hiring mercs, arming them, and training them for the task at hand.

All of this administrative stuff is surprisingly fun and engaging, but Wages of War earns a place on the hard drive with a great tactical combat engine. Sure, it's lifted from progenitors X-COM and Jagged Alliance, but it's also more complete and responsive than the engines in either of those games. Mercs walk, run, crawl, and tense up with convincing animations. The elevation factor makes for a tactician's playground as you use bluffs, ridges, and depressions to your best advantage.

The action plays out in beautifully detailed Super VGA graphics, with cover and elevation as prime considerations.

The highly detailed Super VGA graphics are gorgeous, drawing the eye right into the operation. The sound of gunfire, which few games get right, is intense and realistic—high cracks for AK fire, deep booms for shotguns.

Does Wages of War falter? Unfortunately, yes, in a few key areas. For one, its mercs are devoid of any and all personality, a feature that made Jagged Alliance so entertaining. Instead of coaxing a schizoid bunch of errant individuals into a cohesive unit, Wages of War settles for simply having to balance the mercs' ratings in various statistical areas (marksmanship, technical, etc.)

No surer way to suppress a sniper than lobbing a grenade into his nest.

Another strike is its surprisingly short length. There are only 12 missions, and while each is wonderfully constructed and challenging even at easier difficulty settings, once you've played them, you've played them. Given that there's no multiplayer element and no scenario editor, this is a major handicap.

Yet another strike is its dubious realism. You can shoot just about anyone from just about anywhere on the huge battlefields, regardless of the target's position or cover. Stealth isn't always rewarded—sneaking mercs often take fire from sentries hundreds of yards away. And people are friggin' tough to kill: I put 21 rounds of piercing lead into a bad guy with an M-16, and the bastard was still shooting at me. Twenty-one rounds! Hell's bells!

Is that three strikes? Well, Wages of War can stay in the batter's box a little longer: These bones I pick don't undo the game. It still rewards good, sound tactics. Room-to-room sweeps of office buildings and residences, conducted with sensible SWAT-style finesse, yield results without undue casualties. Every mission contains numerous opportunities for tactical ingenuity to overcome the opposition—things like distracting the bad guys in a gun nest and then sending a guy behind them to lob some grenades. At the successful conclusion of each assignment, you'll have good cause to smirk, light the fat cigar, and say in your best George Peppard impression, "I love it when a plan comes together."

Wages of War isn't perfect, and you won't develop the same bandit's bond with it that you did with Jagged Alliance. But its sharp graphics, memorable man-by-man combat engine, and involving scenarios are enough to accomplish the mission.

WAGES OF WAR

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

War for fun and profit—mostly profit.

DEVELOPER:	Random Games
PUBLISHER:	New World Computing 800-325-8898 www.nwcomputing.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$30–35

TIPS

▼ Smoke is your best friend—almost as important as bullets. Pop smoke grenades to screen your team's advances across open terrain, and pop 'em any other time you're not 100 percent sure you're covered. ▼ Warsaw Pact weaponry has a distinct tendency to jam and break at inopportune times. Think twice before investing in AKs or Chinese-made rifles. ▼ Be sure to provide each merc with a medpack. An ounce of first aid can save you lots of lives. ▼ Milk private citizens for every penny they've got. Unlike the corporations, who will simply look elsewhere, these people are desperate enough to pay. ▼ Have one merc with a high Action Points rating walk point, drawing fire and acting as spotter. ▼ Don't skimp on intelligence. There's nothing worse than setting up a precision op and finding out the hard way that you just shot your way into the wrong building.

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Lords of the Realm II

Conquer medieval England

By Barry Brenesal

PC GAMES A LIST

What? You haven't conquered England yet? For crying out loud, it's 1268 A.D. already—stop lollygagging about! Go out and buy Lords of the Realm II today. You won't be disappointed.

If you haven't played the first LOTR, some introductory notes are in order. It's a turn-based strategy game that focuses on resource allocation. You and four opponents use a mixture of trade, diplomacy, province building, and routine crossborder bloodshed to decide who will rule England.

The basics remain intact in LOTR II. You're still one of five aspirants to the throne, expanding your dominion through a combination of taxes, armies, castle building, alliances, trading, and population growth. The original engine's here, too, and that's a good thing, because it was one of the best products of Impressions' less-than-perfect past. Each of your four adversaries pursues a different strategy to the throne, although any one of them will be perfectly willing to step over your corpse on the way there.

It's not C&C, but combat is still fun.

Cultivate prime farmland to feed the population and generate income.

Detailed, real-time action improves the feel of seizing territory.

Visually, LOTR II has traded in the VGA (320-by-200) look of its forebear for crisp, attractive Super VGA images and animation. (I'm especially fond of the geographical changes that mirror each season's passage.) The authentic medieval music of the original has also been replaced—by folk-pastoral tunes of a much more recent vintage. Given the public's general interest in historical fantasy of the Robin Hood/King Arthur persuasion, these songs probably (and paradoxically) seem more "genuine."

LOTR II's narrator is excellent, his clear British diction ably seconding the parchment-and-calligraphy effect used in dialogue boxes for strong atmosphere. The actors chosen to speak lines for the four computer-driven characters mostly miss the mark with exaggerated effects, though. If the Countess is as politically astute as the documentation says, why does she sound like a 20th-century high-society snob? And why does the Knight have the accent of a working-class Cockney?

The interface in LOTR II is much simplified, and it's all for the better. Context-sensitive help is excellent, as is the accompanying rulebook. There are still some problems, however. The game offers no "cycle-through" command that lets you move from one of your provinces to the next; instead, you have to double-click on each province to access and adjust its resources. When the province is unusually small, this becomes a chore. Also, there's no summary data screen with cattle, grain, lumber, etc., arranged by successive provinces.

Fortunately, LOTR II balances its economic micro-management with exciting real-time combat, replacing the turn-based, rather dreary battles of the original. You'll have siege towers, catapults, battering rams, castle moats, boiling oil, and various personnel types (archers, knights, etc.) to play around with. The whole thing is brought off with energy, ease, and visual panache.

This sequel gets high marks, too, for configurability. It adds 24 different maps, which, combined with many toggle features (starting castle size, game difficulty, number of competing nobles, etc.) make for very configurable, totally distinctive games. Of course, it's network-ready as well, for up to four players using IPX, modem, and null-modem connections.

With Lords of the Realm II, Sierra improves significantly on a very good game of medieval resource management and conquest. The feature set remains largely the same, but the graphics, interface, and—above all—the combat sequences raise this latest LOTR from the status of a gaming baron to a king-of-its-kind.

LORDS OF THE REALM II

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B

A- OVERALL

Excellent AI, graphics, and combat, and a much-improved interface.

DEVELOPER: Impressions
PUBLISHER: Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED: P75, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE: $59.95

TIPS

▼ Since counties must be contiguous to maintain an empire, try grabbing a county from the center of a thriving opponent's domain. ▼ Raise small armies over the seasons and combine them, rather than creating large armies at once. It will be less detrimental to your county's happiness rating. ▼ Reclaim fields as quickly as possible. Lack of usable crops limits population, and population affects things such as army size and materials available for castle building. ▼ All items but grain and cattle are shared from a location central to your counties. So it makes sense to have different counties specialize according to available resources: wood where lumber is plentiful, stone where quarries are easy to come by, and so on. ▼ Build castles as soon as you can. They increase your income and provide excellent defense.

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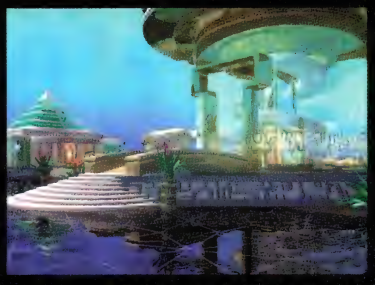

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AGES 6+

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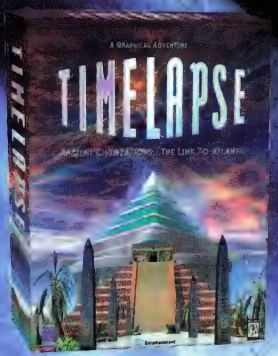


A Graphical Adventure

Killing Time

Two-headed dogs, skeletal hunters, ghostly grannies–oh my!

Too many nasties? Use your .45 sub-machine gun to mow 'em down.

Storytelling and first-person action games often don't mix: You can't see the "plot" through the hail of bullets. But this Win 95 shooter mixes Doom-like gameplay and 7th Guest–style video surprisingly well.

You're charged with uncovering the secrets of an island estate locked in time and filled with the undead. Seamless flowing of the levels creates a sense of a whole as you explore a lighthouse, lookout, hunting lodge, caverns, mausoleum, and topiary. Each is filled with secrets, hiding the ammo for that Thompson machine gun or flamethrower.

The interior artwork is a busy but beautiful mingling of art-deco and Egyptian. And the soundtrack is unrivaled. As a rule, I'm dead-set against any music in action games, but I was utterly taken by the melancholy piano melody of the water-clock room, the muted spectral roar of the gardens, the sad siren song of the docks.

And the video overlays do achieve their purpose in establishing character, place, and plot—as well as providing hints, instructions, and explanations for all the ammo lying around the grounds. The acting is broad, but never awful.

Unfortunately, the graphic fidelity of these low-res transparencies is often wanting; they're often so pixelated that you'd think the characters' faces were being purposefully blurred (a la *COPS*) to protect their identities.

While the game has a pleasantly brawny feel—a little like a "Build" engine game—the gameplay involves the usual shooting critters, solving puzzles, collecting vessels (which give your character superhuman abilities), and so on. The enemies exhibit no real AI, and the level construction no real ingenuity. Installation was one big hassle of locked-up video and skipping voice-over. An onscreen compass would have spared the need for constant reference to the auto-map. And I wish the game didn't issue a death scream every time I moved my character over a place where I could fall. This is more like a gussied-up Doom than a Quake successor. But if you have some time to kill, you could do worse than Killing Time. —*Peter Olafson*

KILLING TIME

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

A shooter with plot and video.

PUBLISHER:	Studio 3DO 800-336-3506 www.3do.com/studio3do
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 12MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, PCI video card, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P100 or higher, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

Battleground 5: Antietam

More of the same

Rebs prepare to launch another furious counterattack into the Miller cornfield.

Question: Why would you buy the same product three times? Answer: You wouldn't. Unless, of course, you were an owner or major stockholder in the company and had a vested interest in seeing its products boost their sales.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what TalonSoft wants you to do when you slap down your hard-earned cash for Battleground 5: Antietam. It's essentially the same game as Battleground 2: Gettysburg and Battleground 4: Shiloh; the only difference is the scenery.

That's not a criticism of the Battleground games: I've liked every one of them. Fact is, though, the once-unique concept has gotten a little old, and the Civil War thing has been done to death. It's time to move on from the hex-grid, turn-based format, which is dull at times. There's just no flow to the action.

Antietam (or Sharpsburg, depending on which side of the Mason-Dixon line you hail from) has all the ingredients that have made the Battleground series so successful: an easy-to-use interface, excellent graphics, authentic war footage and soundtrack and, most importantly, historical accuracy.

The game itself is an excellent rendition of one of the Civil War's bloodiest battles. It features 25 different scenarios, including 15 historical encounters and 10 what-if simulations. There's also the Battle of South Mountain, fought just three days before Antietam. The best scenario is the 10-turn Burnside's Bridge.

Recording and replaying battles, as well as play by e-mail, was introduced in Battleground 3: Waterloo. Upgraded versions of all the past games in the series are included in the package. The upgrades include the above-mentioned features and an added scenario or two at no additional cost. If you're new to the series, or truly enjoy it, you should pick this up. Otherwise, it may seem like an all-too-familiar battle. —*Andrew Miller*

BATTLEGROUND 5: ANTIETAM

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	B

For fans of the series or hardcore Civil War gamers.

DEVELOPER:	TalonSoft
PUBLISHER:	Empire Interactive 800-211-6504 www.empire.co.uk
PLATFORM:	Win CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/33, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	16MB RAM, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$45

Aftershock

Great Quake

PC GAMES A LIST

Easily the best and most ambitious Quake add-on pack is Head Games' Aftershock. It's conceived not so much as a packet of levels as an alternate Quake with three new episodes. A fourth episode allows you to play a passel of nine deathmatch levels.

And they're good. The levels don't *quite* match the heights of Quake's originals. (Some, like Dagger, are just too small and simple.) But they're of classic design, and I've been playing through them with much the same delight (and mingled apprehension) with which I approached the parent game.

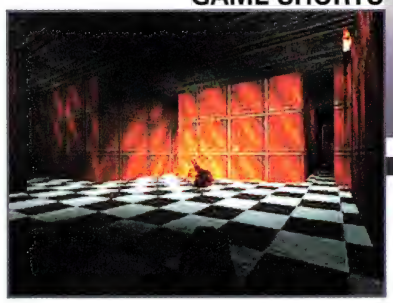
You'll also find a program that, provided you have an Internet connection and Windows 95, will obtain "ping" (response) times from Quake servers; an early version of an easy-to-use, CAD-like Quake editor called Thred; a bushel of diverse tips; and 120 third-party levels for individual play. (Ratings are provided, but no descriptions.) Nice work, and the docs report two more compilations in the works.

—Peter Olafson

PUBLISHER: Head Games Publishing 612-321-9470 www.bpsi.net/headgames
PLATFORM: Win 95CD/Mac CD
STREET PRICE: $20

A- OVERALL

Dark Hour



Very average Quake

New and original levels don't necessarily mean good levels. But Microforum's Dark Hour compilation does have some strong points: a handsome Windows front-end, detailed instructions for the use of Quake's online console, the Quake "Tip of the Day" feature, and the list of Quake-related Web sites. (Why didn't they include direct hypertext links to my browser?)

But, with a couple of pleasant exceptions, I found most of the 23 new levels here mundane and the new textures uninspired, Wolfenstein-like, and sometimes horribly garish. Most of the levels are also very small and, while they may be brimming with monsters, don't offer a tremendous challenge. Some of them could present a few interesting options for deathmatches.

I was also put off by the semi-regular loading failures and bewildered by the "briefing" screen, whose scrolling text orders you to try to rescue fellow soldiers with a minimum of violence. I figured this for a neat new Quake "mod," but never found anyone to rescue and wound up killing everybody as usual.

—Peter Olafson

PUBLISHER: Microforum 800-685-3863 www.microforum.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/Win 3.11 CD with 32-bit extensions
STREET PRICE: $20

C- OVERALL

Morecraft

Finished Warcraft II? The add-on? Now there's Morecraft, Microforum's compilation of 200 cleverly constructed Warcraft II levels.

Being a big fan of multiplayer Warcraft, I quickly tested out the multiplayer levels. Deathmatch Islands 1 and 2 are by far the best: DMI 1 is a series of

The Wars continue

isles connected by a center bridge. The level has no oil except for the little each player starts out with, so a naval front takes great care and strategy. If you're been seeking modem play, there's also One on One, a small, well-balanced two-player level.

Some of the larger single-player levels won't be so appealing to download, so it's nice to have all of them on one disc. Dark Web, for one, has a stunning layout and loads of monsters. It's great fun in solo play.

Morecraft comes with a friendly point-and-click interface and is very easy to use. While many of these levels are available on the Internet, this is the easiest way of storing them, and provides hours more Warcraft gaming. *—Nash Werner*

PUBLISHER: Microforum 800-685-3863 www.microforum.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/DOS CD
STREET PRICE: $30

B OVERALL

Risk

This Risk is a sure thing. Hasbro Interactive's delightful translation of this classic board game is almost everything you could wish for in armchair world conquest.

If you want to play the game straight, it'll do that handily, with tumbling dice and traditional map and inter-region links.

Conquer the world—again!

But you'll forget about "classic" Risk once you've tried the Ultimate variation. It's essentially a whole new game, but one that maintains the pleasant simplicity of the original. There are new tactics, POWs, alliances, multiple maps, and random events—all executed with delightful sound and animation. The AI's reasonably aggressive even at the "easy" level. And Australia's no longer the easily defended dead-end that made it the prize piece of Risk real estate.

Downside: The graphics in Ultimate Risk's battle windows were sometimes corrupted, and the game can be tough to configure on some machines. *—Peter Olafson*

PUBLISHER: Hasbro Interactive 800-638-6927 www.hasbro.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $40

B+ OVERALL

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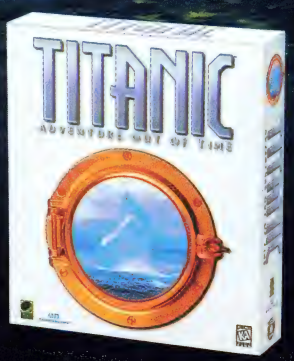

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Designed for Microsoft Windows NT Windows 95

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

STEEL PANTHERS II: STRATEGY & TACTICS
Modern Battles

By Daniel Morris

Tanks moving in platoons of three can efficiently cover and support each other. One "walks point" while the others watch over it.

If war was always hell, then the latter half of our century has made hell even hotter. While "military advances" may be a tragic oxymoron, it's an inescapable fact that the technological and mechanical leaps forged in the heat of the Cold War have irrevocably altered the speed and lethality with which modern armies conduct battle. SSI's Steel Panthers II offers a comprehensive chronicle of the violent era we call our own. Here, now, is your field guide to conquering two of recent history's most complex and deadly battlefields...one that actually happened, and another that thankfully didn't.

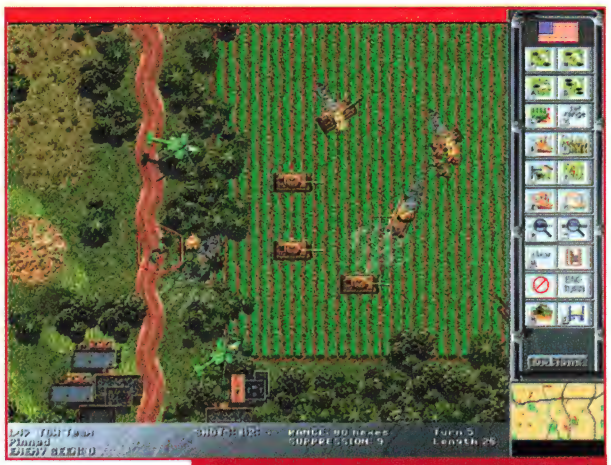
The Golan Heights Campaign (Israel–Syria, 1973)

After Israel more than doubled its size with the lightning gains of the Six-Day War in 1967, Syria and Egypt began a massive rearmament campaign designed to win back the lost territories with a flood of Soviet-made arms. In October 1973, Syria attacked Israeli positions in the Golan Heights, punching a hole in their defense and threatening a drive into Israel. Israel mobilized a furious defense in what would become one of the largest tank battles since World War II.

As Israel, your initial task in the Golan Heights campaign is to provide a stopgap against the Syrian armored thrust that has already overwhelmed your front lines. Your stand is to come at the town of Rafid. When purchasing units for your initial deployment, invest in anti-aircraft units, particularly SAM batteries. Syrian airpower enjoys an advantage in the early stages of the conflict, and it's important to safeguard your tanks from airstrikes. There's no harsher deterrent for MiG-17 and Su-7 fighter-bombers than a few well-placed SAMs.

TOW jeeps are an excellent choice, as they provide a cheap, fast, and highly mobile anti-tank weapon. Send scout jeeps up along main roads until you draw fire from the T-55s advancing on Rafid, and then fall back to the relative safety of the numerous small hills alongside the roads. From here, the jeeps can act as spotters for your heavy artillery. Not only can they spot, they can shoot—TOWs make devastating weapons.

The idea is to make the Syrians pay in steel and blood for every hex between their start point and Rafid. Your role is as momentum-breaker; bog down the Syrian advance with tiny bazooka teams and anti-tank guided-missile trucks. These small units, entrenched and thus relatively safe from Syrian artillery, can retard the advance of much bigger enemy formations.



In any campaign after the Vietnam War, helicopters are your best option for scouting and close support.

When the Syrians finally reach the outskirts of Rafid, you will have your own tank platoons tucked comfortably in the buildings. Use this defensive advantage to shield your precious tanks while pounding the Syrian armor that has to cross wide-open terrain to reach the town. A few well-hidden bazooka teams can win you bonus tank kills in the trenches outside Rafid. And by deploying anti-tank pits and "dragon's teeth" at the city gates, you can force enemy tanks to hold still for a turn or two while you take free shots at them with anti-tank units positioned on a good line-of-sight with the obstacles.

Defending Rafid swings momentum in your favor as the next scenario of the campaign begins. Your job now is to counterattack, suppressing the dug-in Syrian anti-tank units with artillery and infantry and creating fire-free lanes for your tanks to pour in along the flanks of the enemy line. Be wary of mines, which the Syrians are firm believers in, and always have a mineclearer tank "walk point" for armored formations. Never leave tank columns unchaperoned by a forward screen of

Tweaking scenario settings can help Syria reclaim the Golan Heights.

infantry—that way, if you stumble across an ambush, it'll be the grunts who can identify and suppress the shooters, and your tanks can advance unscathed.

Infantry shield the flank of an armored column's advance. Keep these infantry screens in place to protect the vulnerable sides and rear of a tank formation.

The Fulda Gap (NATO–Warsaw Pact, 1980?)

For over 40 years, the world lived in fear of an all-out conflagration between the U.S.-led NATO and Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, with West Germany as the battleground. History spared us the nightmare this war would have been, but Steel Panthers II allows us a look at what could easily have occurred.

The Soviet commander has a simple goal: plow through NATO lines as fast as he humanly can. He has the tools to do it, too. The 3rd Guards Tank Army includes the Red Army's most sophisticated and fearsome armored divisions. At the start of the war, NATO is in the perilous position of being numerically overwhelmed, and its hopes rest on delaying the inevitable Russian advance long enough for the NATO "Reforger" build-up to allow the deployment of reinforcements before all is lost.

Speed is of the utmost importance. Advance behind a rolling barrage of artillery fire designed to dislodge NATO anti-tank units from their nests amid the hilly terrain. Once the barrage has rolled through, mechanized infantry should advance aboard armored personnel carriers behind a screen of smoke. When you encounter the enemy, disembark your infantry and send them at the enemy emplacements, suppressing them with direct fire if the artillery failed to quiet them. With the NATO TOW teams tied up, your heavy tank units may then charge in without much fear. A few enemy anti-tankers are likely to escape your forward screening and a few sniper-style losses of tanks to infantry missile fire will just have to be accepted. Use flanking lines of infantry to quickly suppress these enemies and safeguard the tanks from attacks from the side and rear, where armor is thinnest and the tanks most vulnerable to missiles.

Good commanders are crucial in battle. Use HQ units to rally forces that are taking fire.

NATO's commander is in a "prevent" defense: his job is to prevent a Soviet tidal wave from sweeping through the Fulda Gap and into the Ruhr Valley. As NATO, you have a lot of holes to plug with very few forces. The best strategy is one of fighting retreat: give ground, but fire enough ATGMs and mortar rounds to keep the Soviets from taking territory in huge chunks. As the Israelis will have learned from their tank battles with the Arabs, stubborn resistance from a single well-entrenched infantry anti-tank team can slow an entire armored column to a crawl. Before the Soviets charge with their armor, pay special attention to armored scout units that are acting as spotters for Soviet artillery. By popping smoke in the direction of scout vehicles, you can blind the spotters and make Soviet artillery barrages much less effective.

The terrain of Fulda Gap is very rugged, and what few flat approaches exist must be denied the Russian aggressor. Place anti-tank pits in these valleys and gullies to make them as forbidding to tank treads as hills. It's a good idea to have one ATGM team atop any hill that overlooks a ravine or gully, as you can turn them into deathtraps for overeager Soviet tanks that overreach their infantry screens and wander in.

An object lesson in the value of anti-aircraft fire, courtesy of Iraqi tanks exposed to unforgiving airstrikes.

If you can deny the Soviets the objective hexes at the extreme west of the map, you will find the tide turning in your favor as the campaign continues. With the Russian shock attack stalled, NATO airpower comes to the front. You'll be able to lay down massive airstrikes that doom the Red Army to ignominous retreat. The key is to hold out long enough in the initial scenarios to allow time for NATO to mobilize this airpower. If the Warsaw Pact is to win, it will have to be an immediate and decisive victory. If NATO can withstand the hellish opening salvoes, Germany can be held.

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Can someone tell us why games are becoming more and more like movies? No, stop. We get it: a top-selling hit demands a bigger, better, badder sequel. And we commend the trend, especially when it produces such a wealth of cool new games. While you're loading the latest bad boy, take a second to check out these incredible cheats. We've got codes for the crash 'em, bash 'em Destruction Derbys; those gorgeous Heroes of Might and Magic games; the space-faring Master of Orion II; the latest Quarterback Club; and SimCopter, the high-flying baby in the famous Sim series. Plus, as an added bonus, a code for Amok, a manic, Mech-style shoot-'em-up that's no easy ride. If we can top this list, it'll be one hell of a sequel.

Amok

At the Password prompt (under Options), type **ZZZCYX** to start the game at any level (0–8).

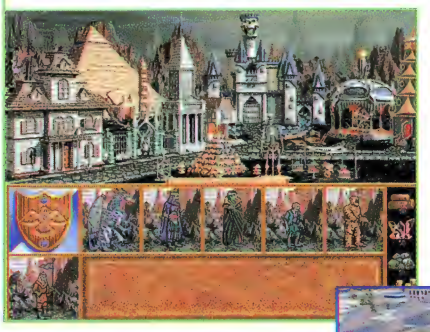
Heroes of Might and Magic I and II

Type these cheats during gameplay:

101495: Reveals the entire map. (HMM I)

8675309: Reveals the entire map. (HMM II)

911: Wins scenario. (HMM II)



Destruction Derby 1 and 2

DD1: For invincibility, select Wreckin Racing and enter your name as **idamage!** To select the number of cars, enter your name as **nplayer.**

DD2: To bash your way through any of the tracks/bowls, follow these steps: (1) Go to begin a racing season. (2) When asked to enter a name, type **MACSrPOO** (case is important). (3) Select end. (4) Quit the season and go to practice mode. Now you can choose any of the seven tracks and any of the four bowls without winning a single race!

NFL Quarterback Club '97

At the Team Select screen in Pre-season mode, enter the following codes:

F1, F1, F2, F2, F1, F2: Constant turbo.

F1, F1, F1, F4, F1, F1: Fumble mode.

F1, F1, F1, F3, F1, F1: Landmine mode.

F4, F2, F5, F3, F4, F5: 47 historic teams.

F4, F2, F5, F4, F4, F5: 47 more historic teams.

F1, F1, F3, F5, F1, F3: Long range (100-yard throws/kicks).

F1, F1, F3, F4, F1, F3: Shadow players.

F1, F1, F1, F2, F1, F1: NFC/AFC in pre-season.

F1, F1, F5, F3, F1, F5: Super slippery.

F1, F1, F5, F2, F1, F5: Super team.

F1, F1, F4, F4, F1, F4: Super-fast team.

SimCopter

Type Ctrl-Alt-x *during gameplay to bring up the cheat-code entry box. Then enter one of the following:*

I'm the CEO of McDonnell Douglas: Lets you type 1 through 9 in copter catalog to get any copter. Type all numbers to get all copters.

Warp me to career: x ("x" equals city number 0–30): Takes you to any career city (in career games only).

Gas does grow on trees: Gives copter full tank of gas.

Give me bucks or give me death: x ("x" equals cash, 0–50,000): Lets you ask for any monetary amount from 0–50,000. However, the more you ask for, the more likely you'll get "death"—immediate shutdown of the game without a chance to save.

Master of Orion II

At the Galaxy Map, while holding down the Alt key, type these cheats (during gameplay):

EINSTEIN: Gives your empire knowledge of every application in every field of research but the Hyper-Advanced fields.

ISEEALL: Toggles omniscience on/off.

MENLO: Finishes current research project.

MOOLA: Gives you 1,000 BC.

SCORE: Shows you your current score.

Also, if you're at the Colony Screen, you can hold down Alt and type **CRUNCH** *to finish your current building project at that colony.*

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your cheat-code requests to:

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Compiled by Corey Cohen

TECHNOBABBLE

Products to embrace—or simply run away from

By David Gerding

Kludge Alert

For those not familiar with it, "kludge" is an old computer hacker term referring to hardware that has been slapped together and pays little, if any, attention to quality. In software, a kludge is often called a hack. Starting with this issue, *PC Games* will reveal the seamy, dark, reckless underbelly of the computer industry. If you read about a company or its products here, exercise extreme caution, or just avoid the culprits like the plague.

Vapor Corporation

A kludgey company? Reveal Multimedia was once a would-be competitor to the likes of Creative Labs and Diamond Multimedia, selling everything from modems to video cards and full multimedia upgrade kits. So what's the problem? Near as we can tell, the company has been out of business for several months but its products are still on retailers' shelves. Reveal's Web site went offline several months ago, and the company's phones have been disconnected. Prior to the disconnection, the company simply stopped answering its main line and seemed to have put its tech-support line on permanent "busy signal" status. Software update options are now zilch.

If you see Reveal products on store shelves, tell your retailer about this article and ask how they plan to support the product they're selling. One salesperson at a local superstore said he had "no problem" recommending the Reveal brand. We then told him about the status of the company and he shrugged sheepishly and expressed a pathetically convincing ignorance of the situation. Caveat Emptor.

Direct X Installer

We love Direct X, the software drivers from Microsoft that let game designers easily exploit sound and graphics hardware acceleration. What we don't like is the installation routine, which installs the "latest" drivers, often without asking permission. The results can be downright annoying. Many graphics cards now come with their own control utilities. Problem is, these utilities lock up or fail to run when they find that the driver has been changed. You have to go back and reinstall your old driver to get things working properly, but install a new game and it happens all over again. We've personally experienced this problem on a range of top boards, and we're not happy about it.

Microsoft isn't the only one to blame; the graphics-card companies should design their utilities to be a little flexible and to explain why they are failing when they do. Before you install Direct X or a game that automatically installs Direct X, check with your graphics-card company's tech-support line. The reps can walk you through the least painful solution.

Required Gear

This month's latest and greatest is the revolutionary Force FX joystick from CH Products. Imagine pulling a tight loop in your flight sim and *feeling the resistance* in the stick and a slight shudder from the engine as the plane fights the G's. Or imagine pulling the trigger of your joystick to fire a gun and feeling the recoil and kick of the gun as it goes off. Force feedback allows gamers to experience touch as well as sight and sound. It's hard to

underestimate how the introduction of another sense changes the overall gaming experience for the better. And the feeling can be eerie.

In order to use force feedback, software needs to be specifically designed to support it. The Force FX is already supported by more than a dozen games (for a full list, see **www.chproducts.com**), with patches being made available to older games on a regular basis and many games in development promising support, which is important since the stick doesn't include bundled software. We tried the Force FX with Need for Speed Special Edition, Fighter Duel SE, and Descent II. In Descent II, the effects were pretty much limited to kickback from the gun, though you also feel the impact when you take a hit. Need for Speed on the Force FX adds the tug of the road—round a tight corner and you have to pull hard to keep the car in the lane. Fighter Duel was the best, letting us feel wind-force effects, machine-gun rattle, enemy hits, and even the rumble of the engine. Playing Fighter Duel with Force FX is so real your hand gets tired!

Like all cutting-edge gear, the price of entry is steep. But when more games become available, it will be well worth it. Now, if someone could only get that smellovision to work interactively... (CH Products; 800-624-5804; $249 list price, $169 street price)

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Acer MMX

Pardon me, but I'm not convinced that the move by computer makers to beautify their CPU cases has resulted in systems that play as good as they look in the home office.

Case in point: the new Acer Pentium 166MHz MMX. If you must have a computer right now to play Pod, SlamScape, and other MMX-enhanced games, as well as run productivity apps, it's a good machine. As an overall game system, however, this MMX model is a mixed bag.

From afar, this charcoal gray tower, same as used with the Aspire line, still looks mighty alluring with its curved facade and sculpted lines.

Our test machine came equipped with 16MB of RAM, a 256K pipeline burst cache, a 2.1GB hard drive, 2MB of EDO video memory to complement the onboard ATI 3D Rage graphics controller, an enhanced IDE bus and 10X CD-ROM drive, a MPEG 1 hardware playback, Acer's 17-inch Super VGA monitor with built-in speakers, a 10-watt subwoofer, a 33.6Kbps fax/modem with telephony options, and Logitech's Wingman Lite joystick.

The system consumers see in-store will come with a 16X CD-ROM drive instead. And in a reversal, Acer is unbundling the monitor, subwoofer, and joystick. These three items add $687 to the list price, and only the subwoofer really stacks up well with third-party products.

Acer's easy-to-understand installation road map makes hooking up all the cables and wires simple for first-timers, and all plug-in points are well-labeled with icons and color codings that match each respective plug.

Although the MMX Aspire is easy enough to set up, it possesses some attributes that will make high-end gamers reconsider their purchase. First off, there's that great-looking case: It's not well-suited for the tinkering a high-end user will inflict on it. After you swing a hinged door out of the way, a circular lock must be turned clockwise before a big handle can be pulled down to swing the case off its rails.

Sounds easy, but the handle action is stiff enough and the plastic molding brittle enough to make anyone think they are about to break the handle off. The handle assembly also takes up space that could have been allocated for at least two internal drive bays.

The high-end gamer that this unit will be marketed at will likely want to get a DVD-ROM drive down the road. Because the standard drive has a proprietary tray to match the Acer's exterior, a DVD-ROM drive can only go in the one available external drive bay. So forget an internal Zip drive.

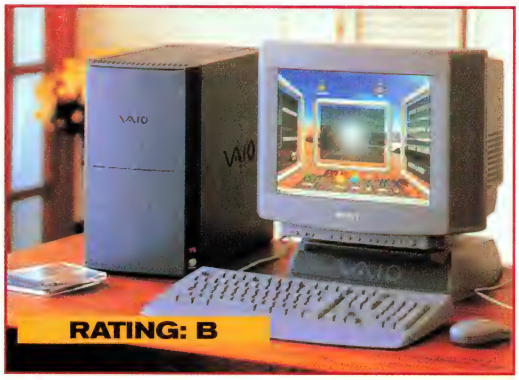
Case grumbling aside, does the system scream? Not really. P166 game machines are showing their age against P200s and Pentium Pros. Most of the early MMX betas ran exceedingly well, showing off what Intel's new multimedia hardware can do, and current titles worked fine. But a P166 may not be enough for many 1997 Windows 95 games.

The ATI Rage video controller is a little twitchy where its drivers are concerned, so be aware that some Win 95 games may throw the video system into cardiac arrest, as our copy of MMX Death-Drome did. However, deleting and reinstalling the drivers fixed the problem.

Acer uses IBM's MWave sound card. Experience with this video board suggests that it's prone to IRQ interrupt glitches and less than 100 percent AWE32 compatibility with DOS games like Duke.

The Aspire MMX is a good solid machine with a three-year warranty that is quite reliable once its design quirks are understood. But those same quirks will have high-end users cursing. Since there probably won't be a deluge of good MMX games released for a while, don't make this your first MMX Pentium. (Acer; 800-733-2237; www.acer.com; $1,699–$2,199) *—George T. Chronis*

PCV-90



Following the lead of the Acer Aspire's decor-friendly box, the Sony PC has set its sights on the company's Mother Lode, mythically referred to as "the living room market." To this end, the Sony PC is ridiculously easy to set up and get humming. A single removable panel houses its guts and makes tweaking a breeze. So how does it do as a game machine?

Splendidly. The Pentium 200, with 32MB of RAM, is more than enough to keep the most resource-intensive games smoking along at a delightful clip. 3D-based games like Quake and Tomb Raider fly on the screen. With an 8X CD-ROM drive and 2.5GB of hard-drive space, the Sony PC has what it takes to be a trusty gaming rig for some time to come.

That quality comes at a price: The PCV-90 will set you back a hefty $2,799. Some other strikes against it include its 28.8 modem, which is perfectly adequate but should have been a 33.6 for this kind of money. The ATI 3D Rage card is touchy about newly installed games tweaking its existing drivers, and can lead to tiresome display problems. Also, there's a highly annoying Sony front-end called VAIO Space; I got smart and rerouted my Start path to take me directly to Win 95, but it left me wondering why Sony even bothered to take up memory with the thing.

Considering it's a first-generation effort, the PCV-90 is a fine gaming machine that won't need major upgrading for a long while. If you can swallow the debt, it's a great choice for gamers who want crackerjack performance without technical hassle. (Sony Computer; 888-476-6972; www.sony.com; $2,799) *—Daniel Morris*

A Fistful of 33.6 Modems

If your first modem was a 1,200-baud Hayes-compatible unit like mine, then the concept of 33.6Kbps modems is a little unreal—especially if you're like most of us and probably think 33.6's are a little slow for today's online gaming and Web duties.

With the majority of new 33.6 internal and external modems hovering around the magic $99 street price, there's no reason not to buy one if you're in need of a new modem—like if you're suffering with a 14.4 or slower model, or if you have a 28.8 unit but would like to use all the new telephony features that come standard these days. But if you already own a good 28.8, chances are you're not going to notice much of a speed increase going to 33.6; more often than not, the only bump you'll get is to a true 28.8 connection. Better to wait to spend your money on one of the 56Kbps modems that are set to hit the market later this year.

That said, if you desperately want that extra speed boost for Quake games on TEN, or to spend untold hours downloading demos via FTP, one of these 33.6 modems may be perfect for you.

Cardinal MVPV34XF

RATING: B

These days, if you have a sound card, video card, SCSI card, and network card installed in your PC, adding an internal modem to your box will earn you an IRQ interrupt conflict, even in Windows 95. Rather than fuss with the problem, a clean solution is buying an external modem.

True, many PC drivers have scoffed at Mac pilots for years about *having* to use externals. Guess what? It makes sense. Most PCs use COM 1 for the mouse, leaving the COM 2 serial port free and clear. Since COM 2 is one of the first interrupts accounted for on the IRQ chain, an external modem is a great solution—and you can watch the lights, too.

If price is a concern, Cardinal's MVPV34XF is often discounted as low as $129 at major computer outlets, and is a good base 33.6 modem. The case design is compact and takes up very little space, which is very convenient on most desktops.

Windows 95 had no problem correctly recognizing the MVPV34XF, and driver installation was easy. Everything from AOL to EarthLink cooperated with the Cardinal just fine with no glitches. Once an acceptable configuration string was found and added to the Win 95 modem options, the MVPV34XF had no problem breaking the 26.4 barrier and sustaining transfer rates at its 33.6 rating.

The one downside to this little modem is the materials used in its case construction. The plastic seems cheap, and the product doesn't seem like it could take much abuse. But if you're looking for a low-priced 33.6 that you won't be hauling around a lot, the Cardinal does the job.

Cardinal MVPV34XF
Cardinal Technologies
800-775-0899
www.cardtech.com
Requires: 386DX/25, 4MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, serial I/O port-16550 UART
Price: $139

SupraExpress 336i SP

RATING: A

It is with great surprise that *PC Games* announces that the 336i SP fax/modem actually lived up to its Plug-and-Play billing! This isn't a knock on Diamond modems, but past experience with Plug-and-Play products has shown most are really Plug-and-Pray.

Not in this case: The 336i was a snap to set up—we simply inserted it into an available PCI slot, turned on the PC, installed the drivers off the supplied floppy disk, and we were in business. Not only was the 336i easy to use, but it's also one of the most stylish modems you can install; its sloped design will amaze your friends.

Okay, maybe not once you put the cover on your PC, but its list of features *will* amaze. Not only can it communicate at speeds of up to 33.6Kbps (14.4 is the max when faxing), but it also has Analog Simultaneous Voice & Data support, which means the 336i can act as a full-duplex speakerphone—so you can talk or sling insults while playing a game with a friend.

The 336i SP is also video-phone-ready, which means you can use it as a video-phone—provided, of course, you already have a sound card, video-capture board, digital video camera, Win 95, and video phone software.

Most importantly, however, the modem really sped up game downloads and Madden and Diablo modem matches.

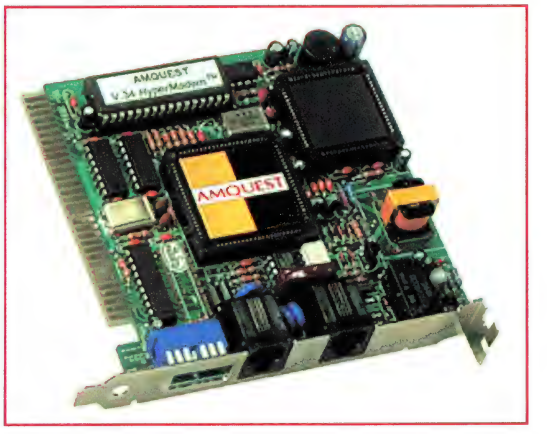
SupraExpress 336i SP
Diamond Multimedia Systems
800-727-8772
www.diamondmm.com
Requires: 386/33, 4MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or Win 3.1 or Win 95, 16-bit ISA slot
Recommended: 486/66, 16MB RAM
Price: $129

Amquest V.34

RATING: C-

It's always odd when you open up the box to get at your new external modem and then find instructions on how to open your computer case and install the modem in an internal expansion slot. There's a technical illustration of an internal modem on the front of the Amquest V.34 owner's manual. This 16-page booklet was largely useless because it wasn't even for the model included in the box. A careful search of the box yielded one sheet tucked in as an addendum for the model we'd received. One envelope-sized sheet!

Installing the hardware was simple enough, requiring only a free serial port on the PC and the phone line. But software installation proved to be more daunting. There were three disks included, and the manual (this is the manual for the internal modem, once again) wasn't very specific about where to start. So I picked a disk and began. Strike one. Luckily, the second disk I tried proved to be the magic one, though its default port detection was wrong and had to be adjusted.



Once all this was done, the modem performed just fine. I installed it on a PC that had been using a 14.4 modem, and the increased speed in downloading time was immediately noticeable. The hardware and soft-

Win 95 is *cool*, but *sucks* with DOS games!

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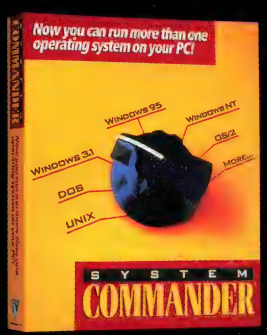

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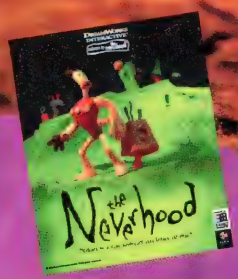

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the Neverhood™

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ware had no difficulty jumping into Windows 95 and assuming the reins of my communications setup.

Let's just hope that Amquest gets around to providing buyers with some semblance of how to use their modems. You can figure it out if you know your way around COM ports and IRQ-settings. You'd better: The company's technical-support line is an automated system with a message asking you to wait one or two business days because of the high volume of calls. Scary music fades in...

Amquest V.34
Amquest
800-577-3335
www.amquestcorp.com
Requires: IBM PC, 4MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, serial I/O port-16550 UART
Price: $279

U.S. Robotics Sportster V.34 Faxmodem

RATING: A-

Right now, support for the U.S. Robotics Sportster V.34 external modem isn't likely to be much of a factor: We found configuring this one to be a simple exercise, we got it up and running in virtually no time—and its nice, small footprint meant little space taken up on our crowded desk. Moreover, throughput was clean and stable on a phone line that frequently offers up "dirty," downgraded connections. Features included the standard 14.4 fax speed, Internet and online-service connection software, and handy printed guides to the Sportster and the wonders of the World Wide Web.

All that means that for gamers, you'll get the best shot at a smooth connection for your play. However, the exciting prospect that puts the Sportster near the front of our line for modem choices is a little piece of USR software called X2 that promises a seamless upgrade to 56Kbps. Yes, that's right, folks—ISDN speeds without the cost and hassle of ever having your local phone company drop in an ISDN line. X2 should be in testing as you read this—although 56K modem-to-modem connections will require a Sportster on either end, USR has lined up X2 support from several prominent national Internet service providers, including Netcom, MCI, and U.S. West, as well as the likes of America Online and CompuServe.

In short, the Sportster may give many gamers a true shot at connection speeds that once seemed like a pipe dream. (We plan to test this out; check future issues for our results.) With that in the offing, if you're going to spring for a 33.6, you may find it worth your while to grab a Sportster. If you'd rather wait, there's no guarantee that X2 will become a 56Kbps standard; no harm in being cautious.

Sportster 33.6 Faxmodem
U.S. Robotics
800-342-5877
www.usr.com
Requires: IBM PC, 4MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95
Price: $180

Hayes Accura 336 DSVD

RATING: B+

DSVD stands for digital simultaneous voice and data. And it rocks. This technology makes it possible to talk to a guy at the same time you blast his ugly avatar away in a game, at least if he has a DSVD modem as well.

That's the problem: Not a lot of people have modems with this technology, so I wasn't able to try this option in a game environment during the testing period. But I was able to reach out to some non-gamers with DSVDs to test the voice features on this external, and they work great. Granted, the built-in microphone doesn't provide great audio quality, but Hayes provides a better external microphone that plugs into a miniplug input, and you can always spend the money on a nicer microphone.

As a data modem, the Accura screams. Throughput often pops into the 50Kbps range during downloads, which seems a bit faster than throughput provided with the Cardinal reviewed above. Hayes claims this is a benefit of the DSVD technology, but future testing is needed to confirm that.

Installation of the Accura 336 was straightforward, with Windows 95 recognizing the modem and its drivers without a hitch. This package comes with a rich bundle of software on CD-ROM. Hayes includes its Smartcom Message Center LE suite of voice, fax, and data utilities. In addition, you get Quarterdeck's WebTalk and Internet Suite 2 software products. Gamers new to auto racing games will enjoy the OEM version of NASCAR Racing, which is also in the box.

What's more, this external is wrapped in a sleek case made with high-quality plastic and sporting a decent speaker on the top. Conclusion? Not bad for an industry pioneer that was on the ropes a few short years ago.

Accura 336 DSVD
Hayes Microcomputer Products
800-723-8388
www.hayes.com
Requires: IBM PC, 4MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, CD-ROM drive, serial I/O port-16550 UART
Price: $209

Motorola ModemSURFR 33.6

RATING: B+

If you've got an eye for design, this puppy fits the bill: It's sleek, and it works. Motorola has concentrated hard on its SURFR line of standard and ISDN modems, and the ModemSURFR 33.6 external fits well into the whole range.

This is another modem with relatively painless configuration, although we had one instance of clear line interference, which some of the other modems handled well. However, Motorola compensates with the sheer thoroughness of its package. The manual is crystal-clear, with instructions on how to handle COM port and IRQ settings that a grade-school student could understand. They also toss in a slew of Internet, online-service, and other software, including versions of Loadstar and Wingnuts for gamers. The ModemSURFR also contains 14.4 fax capability and a nice bonus—built-in Caller ID recognition if you subscribe through your phone company's Caller ID program. (Motorola's VoiceSURFR, slightly more expensive than the ModemSURFR, adds DSVD capability.)

Motorola also promises future firmware upgradability to industry-standard 56Kbps via its Tidal Wave program, which offers free enrollment through February 28 via the company's 800 number or its Web site. In all, the ModemSURFR is another good choice if you're going the external route.

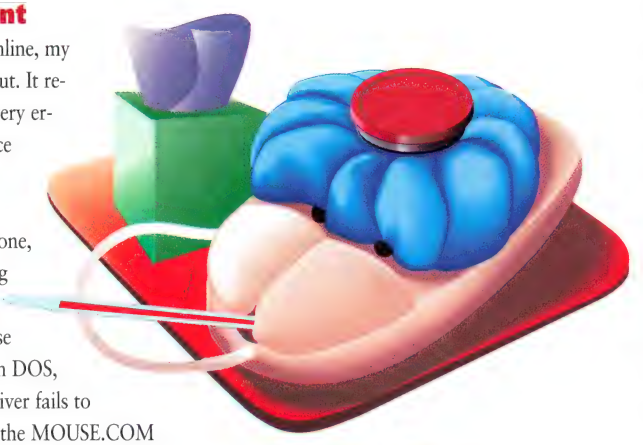
ModemSURFR 33.6
Motorola
800-426-6336
www.mot.com
Requires: 386, 4MB RAM, 20MB hard disk space, DOS or Windows, CD-ROM drive
Price: $159

TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

Blind mice, upgrade wait, RPG envy, and inoculations

By Patrick Marshall

Troubled Rodent



Q Recently, while I was online, my mouse began to freak out. It responded to my moving it, but very erratically and unpredictably. Since then, it has been unusable. I've checked the mouse for dirt or other obstructions and found none, which leads me to believe (along with other indicators) that the problem isn't with the mouse directly. When my computer's in DOS, as it's booting up, the mouse driver fails to initialize. However, when I run the MOUSE.COM file that loads the mouse driver, a light on my external modem labeled TR lights up briefly and then goes off. The same thing happens when I start up Windows. The mouse is connected to my COM1 port, and my modem to the remaining COM2 port. I've checked the Control Panel/Ports Settings in Windows to see if there is an IRQ conflict between the two ports, and there is none.

Greg
Via the Internet

A *I wouldn't rule out the mouse quite yet. From the sound of it, you have some sort of erratic hardware-connection problem. It could be in the circuitry inside the mouse, the mouse cable, the connection between the mouse and the serial port, the serial port itself, or even the motherboard. When your system attempts to load the mouse driver, it goes out to detect the mouse. When it doesn't find it on one serial port, it looks to the other. That's why you see the light flash on your modem: it's your computer checking to see if the device is a mouse. You may as well troubleshoot the least-expensive and easiest-to-replace device first. Just to play it safe, try reinstalling your mouse drivers. If that doesn't solve the problem, try another mouse on the computer. If the problem disappears, you're in business. If it doesn't, save the new mouse until your old one wears out. Then move to step 2: try new serial ports. If your current serial ports are on the motherboard, consult your system manual to find out how to disable them, then install a high-speed serial-port card (which you can find at most computer stores for under $50). If your current serial ports are already on an add-in card, just remove the card and insert a new one.*

More Power

Q I have a Pentium 133 with the Triton chip set, and was wondering, Is it possible to upgrade to a better Pentium chip (150 or 166) by just replacing the CPU?

Nathan Waidelich
Wauseoun, OH

A *Soon, yes; now, no. OverDrive processors are available to change a Pentium 75 into a Pentium 125, a Pentium 90 into a Pentium 150, and a Pentium 100 into a Pentium 166. Unfortunately for you, that's where the wagon train ends. There is as yet no OverDrive upgrade for Pentium 133 and 166 systems, though Intel plans to deliver them sometime in 1997. Keep in mind, however, that whether the OverDrive processor will work in your particular system depends on the specific model of your computer. You should either contact the maker of your system or check with Intel at 800-538-3373. You can also check out Intel's Web page at* **www.intel.com**.

Slow Duke

Q I am running a 486DX2/50 with DOS 6.22. I recently upgraded Duke Nukem 3D from the shareware to the registered version and plopped down some cash for 16MB of RAM for better play. Yet, the game doesn't seem to have sped up at all. Since I now have a total of 20MB of RAM (one 16MB and one 4MB chip), I'm wondering if my problem is the processor. Any advice?

Scott Rust
Mesa, AZ

A *Well, since Duke Nukem requires 8MB of RAM for a 486 and 16MB of RAM for a Pentium, you should have enough memory to be getting good performance (assuming the additional memory is active). The first thing I'd do is check your computer as it posts to make sure it's recognizing all the RAM. Some systems are very particular about the increments in which you can add RAM and the order of slots the SIMMs must go in. You would, of course, get significantly better performance on a fast Pentium than on a 50MHz 486. Another potential bottleneck is your graphics adapter. You don't say what kind of adapter you're using now, but if it's an older, slower one, it could be holding back any performance gains you might have realized by adding RAM.*

Virus Prophylactic

Q About a week ago, my computer was infected by a virus. I took it to some computer guys and they ran a "clean boot virus scan" on it. I would like to buy my own program to prevent viruses. In your opinion, what's the best anti-virus program that prevents and removes viruses and runs on Windows 95? And about how much would it cost?

Chris Seedle
Via the Internet

A *I haven't seen an anti-virus program yet that can snag every type and variant of virus. That said, for Windows 95 systems I'd probably choose Symantec's Norton Anti-Virus for Windows 95. The program is better integrated with Windows 95 than the competition and does a very creditable job of detecting and disposing of a wide range of viruses, including macroviruses, a variant that some anti-virus programs can't handle. Also, Symantec makes regular updates of virus profiles easily available via its BBS. The program has a list price of $70.*

Don't forget, however, that there are other factors you may want to consider in making your own choice of programs. Price, of course, may be an issue. And you'll find quite a bit of variation in the speed of scanning. Finally, you may want to look into other programs if you're on a network or are concerned about Web viruses.

Fax, mail, or e-mail your queries to the S.O.S. staff at:
PC Games
951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700
San Mateo, CA 94404
Fax: 415-349-7482
Internet: sos@pcgames.com

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FACE-OFF

Ouch! We Got Snipers in Here!

Don St. John *George T. Chronis*

The advent of first-person multiplayer shooters has given birth to the inevitable: Like it or not, nearly every game you play is going to have somebody hiding in the shadows, popping away and running up high kill numbers while the other numbskulls run around thinking they're supposed to have a game. It's called sniping, of course, and either you love it or despise it. Here at *PC Games*, we've got both: Features editor Don St. John's beliefs are reflected in prideful **bold**, while news & technology editor George T. Chronis' remarks are in shifty *italics*.

Cowardly or smart? You make the call.

Don't shoot until you see the whites of his eyes.

Well, I can't believe somebody actually crawled out of their dark corner to defend sniping as a practice—because it can't possibly *be* defended. I'll sum up the sniper in one word: Wuss. OK, you want two words? Unskilled wuss.

I'm surrounded by whiners. When did all this "Meet me on the chivalrous field of battle" crap get started? We're almost into the 21st century, and the object of war is to win. And the best way to win is by playing smart from one's strengths, not an adversary's. If that means blowing your hulking carcass away from a dark corner, such is the fortunes of war—accept it and die like a man.

There's a difference between war and battle, schmuck. These games are battles, mano a mano—with everything that entails. That means me against you: Can you outmatch me? Can you outskill me? Can you strafe, move, do whatever it takes to win the race? If you could, you wouldn't have to hide in a vent shaft, would you? That's hardly what I'd call "one's strengths."

You of all people should know that grand old Irish proverb, "Better to be a coward today than dead the whole rest of your life." But on to your points: If you're dead, I've outmatched you. If you're dead, I've outskilled you. If you're dead, I've done what it takes to grind your sorry butt into sausage. Victory is strength. And if I die, I don't cry about it...macho man.

No, you merely find another vent to skulk in. Besides, I may be dead, but I get to respawn, whereas you'll always be a wuss. And I get to enjoy the free, untrammeled feeling that comes with taking full advantage of a game's environment and of all the programming work that the industry's best minds put into it. That's the point you miss by choosing to find one weapon and a little hidey hole. I'd rather die as a gamer than live as a snipe, because the true gamer's credo is that of Lt. Worf in *Star Trek: TNG*: "It is a good day to die." If that's macho, I'll take it.

Growl for me some more, Microbrain. What makes you think I don't take full advantage of the environment? Actually, I must take more advantage of it. As you go flitting back from zone to zone in gay abandon, I've got to spot dark corners for further reference. What your ilk can't come to grips with is that there is some aspect of the game that can beat you. Granted, you may be a grand shooter and hard to kill in a face-to-face battle, but why should I give you an easy victory to feed your over-inflated ego? How do easy kills make you a more ethical gamer? Better to bleed you so you're always looking over your shoulder.

Looking for your weenie butt, you mean. But enough of this: Let's settle it in The Dark Zone, shall we?

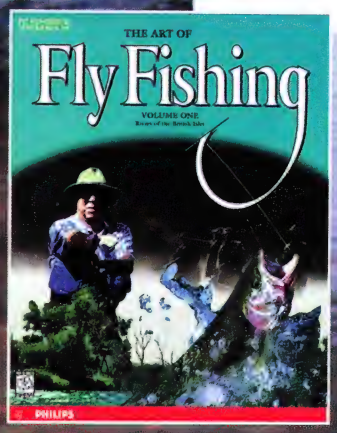
Fine. See you there.

I doubt it...

George T. Chronis is on a mission to evangelize "fallen" gamers on his true path. His favorite shooter these days is the Duke Nukem Plutonium Pak, although in the Pantheon of great shooters he still holds a fond place in his sniping heart for Wolfenstein 3D and Dark Forces. He looks forward to the moment when LucasArts gives him a gold beta of Jedi Knight, so he may finally bring his heretical ways to the *Star Wars* universe.

Don St. John found a new reason to live when he discovered the secret red room on Duke Nukem 3D's Hollywood Holocaust level...but he came back out right away. He likes the thunderbolt in Quake and the warbird in SubSpace a lot, too.

Kicks Bass.



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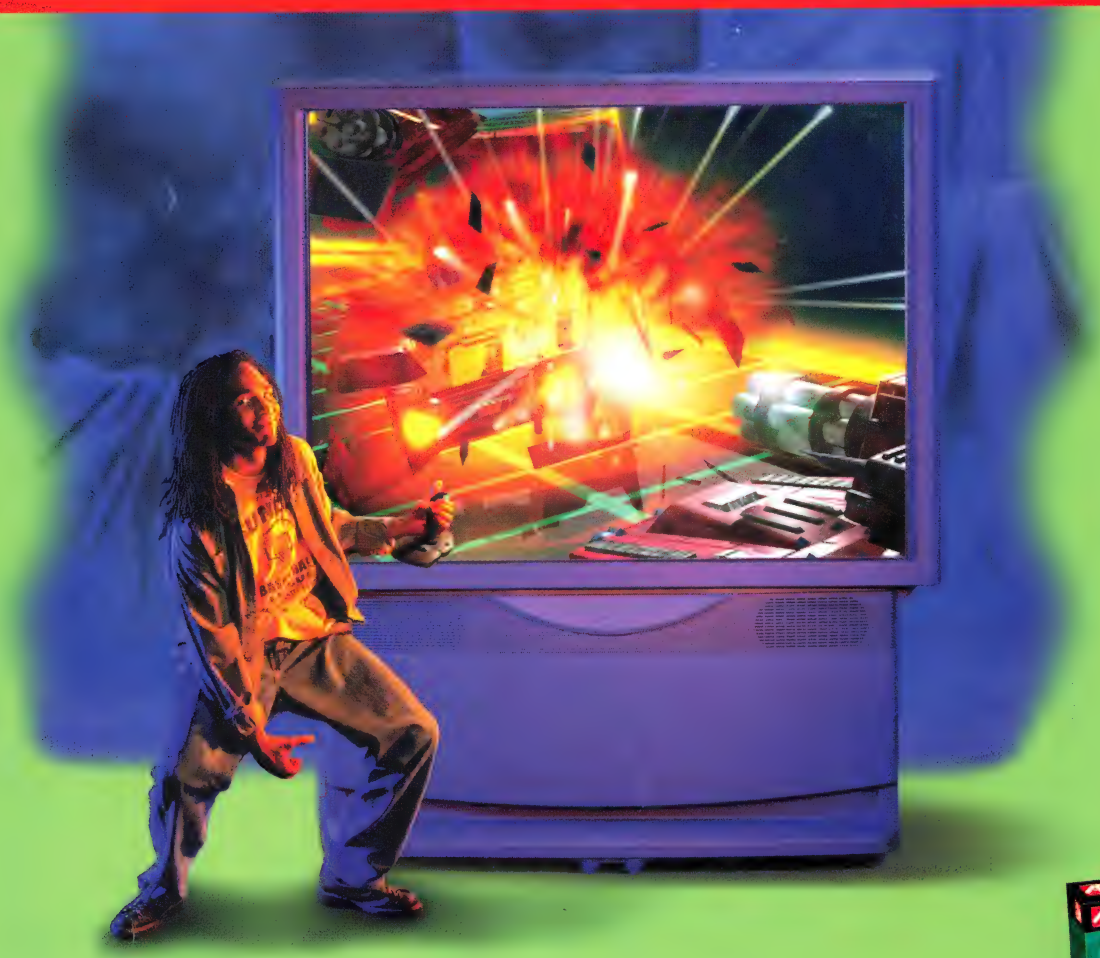

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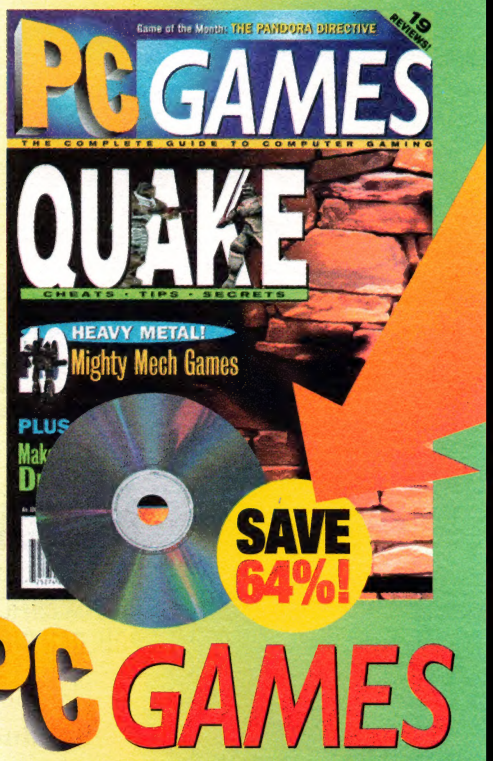

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